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: REV. W. A.
GRIFFITH THOMAS, D.D.

A DEVOTIONAL
: COMMENTARY :



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GENESIS XXV. 11—XXXVI. 8

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A DEVOTIONAL COMMENTARY
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GENESIS

XXV. 11—XXXVI. 8

A DEVOTIONAL COMMENTARY

By the

Rev. W. H. GRIFFITH THOMAS, D.D., 1861-1924.

Principal of Wycliffe Hall, Oxford

Author of

'The Apostle Peter: Outline Studies in his Life, Character,
and Writings,' &c.

SECOND EDITION



LONDON

THE RELIGIOUS TRACT SOCIETY

4 BOUVERIE STREET and 65 ST PAUL'S CHURCHYARD, E.C.

1909

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INTRODUCTORY NOTE

IN accordance with the purpose of the series of Devotional Commentaries, of which this volume forms a part, the narratives of the patriarchs are taken as they stand, and an endeavour is made to deduce from them their spiritual meaning and messages. Questions of criticism are therefore not discussed unless where (as in chap. xlix.) they are thought to be necessary to the elucidation of the passage.

It is well known that three very different views are held as to these narratives. (1) The extreme critical view, of which Wellhausen is the representative. This regards everything in Genesis before Abraham as mythical, and the narratives of the patriarchs legendary though with elements of truth. On this view the stories indicate the knowledge of Israel at a time much later than the patriarchs, and therefore represent tribal occurrences of subsequent periods. (2) The moderate critical view, of which Dr Driver is the representative. This regards these narratives as substantially true, but with the characters and experiences idealized. The outline is held to be accurate, but the details are said to be coloured by the associations of later ages. The oral tradition is regarded as the basis, though it is now quite unknown how far the original nucleus has been modified in the course of time. (3) The

Introductory Note

conservative view, of which Dr Green and Dr Orr are the representatives. This holds that the narratives are not tribal but personal, not legendary but historical, and that their historical character is being confirmed by the discoveries of archæology both in regard to Babylonia and Egypt. The present Commentary proceeds on the last-named assumption. For those who desire to study the critical questions involved, reference may be made to Dr Driver's *Genesis*, and *Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament*; Green's *Unity of the Book of Genesis*; Orr's *Problem of the Old Testament*; and an article in the *Quarterly Review* for January 1907, by Professor George Adam Smith.

I

THE BIRTH OF JACOB

GEN. xxv. 11-28

11. And it came to pass after the death of Abraham, that God blessed his son Isaac; and Isaac dwelt by the well Lahai-roi.

12. Now these *are* the generations of Ishmael, Abraham's son, whom Hagar the Egyptian, Sarah's handmaid, bare unto Abraham:

13. And these *are* the names of the sons of Ishmael, by their names, according to their generations: the firstborn of Ishmael, Nebajoth; and Kedar, and Adbeel, and Mibsam,

14. And Mishma, and Dumah, and Massa,

15. Hadar, and Tema, Jetur, Naphish, and Kedemah:

16. These *are* the sons of Ishmael, and these *are* their names, by their towns, and by their castles; twelve princes according to their nations.

17. And these *are* the years of the life of Ishmael, an hundred and thirty and seven years: and he gave up the ghost and died; and was gathered unto his people.

18. And they dwelt from Havilah unto Shur, that *is* before Egypt, as thou goest toward Assyria: *and* he died in the presence of all his brethren.

19. And these *are* the generations of Isaac, Abraham's son: Abraham begat Isaac:

20. And Isaac was forty years old when he took Rebekah to wife, the daughter of Bethuel the Syrian of Padan-aram, the sister to Laban the Syrian.

21. And Isaac intreated the Lord for his wife, because she *was* barren: and the Lord was intreated of him, and Rebekah his wife conceived.

22. And the children struggled together within her; and she said, If *it* be so, why *am* I thus? And she went to enquire of the Lord.

23. And the Lord said unto her, Two nations *are* in thy womb, and two manner of people shall be separated from thy

Genesis xxv. 11—xxxvi. 8

bowels; and *the one* people shall be stronger than *the other* people; and the elder shall serve the younger.

24. And when her days to be delivered were fulfilled, behold, *there were* twins in her womb.

25. And the first came out red, all over like an hairy garment; and they called his name Esau.

26. And after that came his brother out, and his hand took hold on Esau's heel; and his name was called Jacob: and Isaac *was* threescore years old when she bare them.

27. And the boys grew: and Esau was a cunning hunter, a man of the field; and Jacob *was* a plain man, dwelling in tents.

28. And Isaac loved Esau, because he did eat of *his* venison: but Rebekah loved Jacob.

Gen. xxv.
11-28.

‘GOD buries His workmen and carries on His work.’ This is the simple but significant truth taught in the verse that immediately follows the record of the burial of Abraham. ‘And it came to pass after the death of Abraham that God blessed his son Isaac.’ God calls His servants to Himself, but His purposes abide. Abraham dies, but God lives, and the Divine blessing continues to rest upon the son of His servant. Abraham's seed was already experiencing the commencement of the fulfilment of the Divine promise, ‘In thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed.’ We have now to follow the course of the Divine purpose and see how it was carried out; how the unchanging God continued with His servants, blessing them and fulfilling His own word of truth and grace.

The second half of Genesis contains the generations of Ishmael (xxv. 12-18), of Isaac (xxv. 19—xxxv. 29), of Esau (xxxvi. 1-43), and of Jacob (xxxvii. 2—l. 26). The record deals very briefly with the stories of Ishmael and Esau, the brevity

The Birth of Jacob

indicating the definite purpose of Genesis, which is to show the fulfilment of the promise to Abraham and the development of God's purpose of redemption (iii. 15). **Gen. xxv. 11-28.**

The lives of Abraham and Jacob stand out prominently in the record. Of Isaac much less is said. His life was practically devoid of striking incident, his character was quiet and passive, and, except as a link in the chain of the fulfilment of the Abrahamic promise, he is of no special importance in the patriarchal history. It is different with Jacob. God is known as the God of Abraham, but still more definitely as the God of Jacob. The latter title is particularly appropriate in view of the fact that Jacob was the direct and immediate ancestor of the twelve tribes of Israel.

The life of Jacob is of interest and value, not merely as a revelation of human character, but also and chiefly as a manifestation of Divine grace. Viewed from the standpoint of his nature, Jacob is unattractive and even repulsive; but as we study his history step by step we become conscious that God's grace is at work, moulding and fashioning him by the discipline of sorrow, suffering, and loss. There is no character in Holy Scripture which more clearly manifests the glory of Divine grace in dealing with the most forbidding of materials. And because the record in Genesis holds the mirror up to nature and also reveals the glory of grace, the story of Jacob has a perennial interest for us all. We see ourselves in the story of Jacob; our weaknesses, and yet our aspirations; our failures, and

Importance
of Jacob's
Life.

Genesis xxv. 11—xxxvi. 8

Gen. xxv. yet our fresh starts; our cowardice, and yet our
11-28. endeavour to trust God.

At the point at which we take up the story of Genesis, we are introduced to the family life of the patriarch Isaac. He has been married many years, his father is still alive, and nothing of moment in connection with the development of the Divine purposes seems to have occurred since the day of his marriage. Consider carefully each element in this picture of family life.

I. The Husband (vers. 20, 21).

I. *The Husband* (vers. 20, 21).—Isaac was experiencing a great disappointment. It was now nearly twenty years (ver. 26) since that memorable day when he first saw the wife of God's choice. And yet his home was still without a child. Year after year had passed, and there was no fulfilment of the Divine promise. This was a real trial and a definite test of his faith. The Divine message had been clear that in Isaac, not in Ishmael, Abraham's seed was to be called; and yet now it seemed almost impossible that the promise could be fulfilled. God's delays, however, are not necessarily denials, and the fulfilment of the promise was not the only element in the Divine purpose. The training of faith and the discipline of character were also in view, and we feel sure God delayed the fulfilment of His word in order that all human hope which rested solely on natural powers should give way, and the Divine action might be made still more prominent.

In his difficulty and trial Isaac did the very

The Birth of Jacob

best possible thing; he took it to the Lord in prayer. **Gen. xxv. 11-28.**

The answer soon came. God had only been testing His servant's faith, and we are clearly intended to understand that the gift of the children was a definite grant from God, a Divine interposition in order to make it still more evident that the promise to Abraham was by grace and not by nature. God often delays in the bestowal of His grace in order that we may the more thoroughly rely upon Him and the more definitely realize that our expectation is from Him, and not merely from secondary causes or natural laws.

II. *The Wife* (vers. 22, 23).—Even now every-
thing was not clear, and it was Rebekah's turn to
experience distress and perplexity. She could not
understand God's dealings with her, and wondered
as to the cause of it. Like her husband, however,
she did the very best thing; she turned to God and
inquired of Him. How often it has occurred since
that day that God's children have received answers
from Him very different from what they have
expected, and have experienced perplexity as to
the meaning of the Divine discipline! Sometimes
in the pathway of duty, when the soul is sincerely
conscious of uprightness and whole-hearted con-
secration to God, there is trouble, trial, difficulty,
and anxiety. A man believes he has been right in
following a certain pathway, only to find himself
surrounded by almost overwhelming anxieties and
difficulties. The forces of evil seem more active
than ever, and he begins to wonder whether he was

II. *The
Wife* (vers.
22, 23).

Genesis xxv. 11—xxxvi. 8

Gen. xxv. 11-28. right, after all, in doing what he has done. Like Rebekah, he must again resort to God and seek out the Divine will.

God's Answer.

The answer is very striking. Rebekah was taught that her trouble involved great and far-reaching results. She was first of all told that she was to have two sons, not one; then that the two sons would represent two nations which are to be opposed to each other from the very first; and, last of all, that the elder was to serve the younger. Thus Rebekah was the unconscious instrument of carrying out the Divine purpose. Her trouble had nothing whatever to do with herself individually, but was part of a great Divine plan which God was about to work out for His own glory.

In all this we see the marvel and glory of the Divine sovereignty. Why the younger son should have been chosen instead of the elder we do not know. It is, however, very striking to find the same principle exercised on several other occasions. It is pretty certain that Abraham was not the eldest son of Terah. We know that Isaac was the younger son of Abraham, and that Joseph was not the eldest son of Jacob. All this goes to emphasize the simple but significant fact that the order of nature is not necessarily the order of grace. All through, God desired to display the sovereignty of His grace as contrasted with that which was merely natural in human life. The great problem of Divine sovereignty is of course insoluble by human intellect. It has to be accepted as a simple fact. It should, however, be observed that it is

The Birth of Jacob

not merely a fact in regard to things spiritual ; it is found also in nature in connection with human temperaments and races. All history is full of illustrations of the Divine choice, as we may see from such examples as Cyrus and Pharaoh. Divine election is a fact, whether we can understand it or not. God's purposes are as certain as they are often inscrutable, and it is perfectly evident from the case of Esau and Jacob that the Divine choice of men is entirely independent of their merits or of any pre-vision of their merits or attainments (Rom. ix. 11). It is in connection with this subject that we see the real force of St Paul's striking words when he speaks of God as acting 'according to the *good pleasure* of His will' (Eph. i. 5); and although we are bound to confess the '*mystery* of His will' (Eph. i. 9), we are also certain that He works all things 'after the *counsel* of His will' (Eph. i. 11). There is nothing arbitrary about God and His ways, and our truest wisdom when we cannot understand His reasons is to rest quietly and trustfully, saying, 'Even so, Father, for so it seemeth good in Thy sight.' 'In His Will is our peace.'

III. *The Sons* (vers. 24-28).—From the moment of their birth the sons differed in appearance, and their unlikeness was a symbol of that hostility which characterized their after-life and the history of their descendants. The outward signs were expressive of real differences. As they grew they were also very different in pursuits, Esau being a clever hunter, a man of outdoor life; while Jacob

Gen. xxv.
11-28.
Divine
Sovereignty.

III. The
Sons (vers.
24-28).

Genesis xxv. 11—xxxvi. 8

Gen. xxv. 11-28. was just the opposite—a quiet (Revised Version, margin), home-keeping man. Their names were given with reference to the facts which were evident at their birth. Esau was so called because of his hairy aspect, and Jacob from his laying hold of his brother's heel at their very entrance upon life.

**Differences
in the Home.**

They also differed in regard to the paternal affection bestowed upon them. Esau was his father's favourite, Jacob his mother's. Isaac, the quiet, passive man, saw in Esau, the bold hunter, the energetic nature of the woman whom he had loved as a wife all those years. Rebekah, the strong, self-assertive woman, saw in the quiet, gentle Jacob the quiet, passive husband whom she had loved so long. It is often found that the father loves the boy or girl who resembles the mother, while the mother is frequently found to favour the boy or girl whose nature is most akin to the father; but when, as in this case, partiality is carried to great extremes, nothing but trouble can be the result. God's revelation about the younger ruling the elder was obviously no secret. Both parents and sons must have known of it, and it is this knowledge that makes the partiality more heinous, and at the same time more deplorable in its results.

**Suggestions
for Medita-
tion.**

1. *In times of difficulty or perplexity let us wait and pray.*—Both Isaac and Rebekah experienced the real difficulty of not knowing how God's will and purpose were to be fulfilled. They did the very best possible thing; they handed their difficulty over

The Birth of Jacob

to God in trust and prayer. In the midst of perplexity it is not wise or well to be too much occupied in telling others of our troubles. Our wisdom and comfort will be found in telling the Lord Himself. 'Half the breath thus vainly spent' should be sent to Heaven in supplication. Waiting for God and waiting on God will always be our greatest consolation.

Gen. xxv.
II-28.
Wait and
Pray.

2. *In the face of deep problems of life let us trust and pray.*—Rebekah could not understand the circumstances which were causing difficulty and anxiety; and even after the revelation of God concerning the younger son there must have been not a little perplexity to know the meaning of it all. Our greatest wisdom in all such circumstances is found in simple trust and earnest prayer. God's ways are not our ways, nor His thoughts our thoughts (Isa. lv. 8). We may perhaps have no real thought beyond our own little horizon, but it may be that God is working out His purpose through us on a large scale. What matters it what we endure, so long as God's will is being done through us? Let us abide in humble trust and hopeful prayer and 'believe to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living.'

Trust and
Pray.

3. *In the presence of home troubles and trials let us watch and pray.*—Isaac and Rebekah clearly brought upon themselves a great deal of their trouble by their partiality for the sons, and when home life is thus disturbed by jealousies and quarrelling we may be sure that God's blessing is withheld. 'Watch and pray lest ye enter into tempta-

Watch and
Pray.

Genesis xxv. 11—xxxvi. 8

Gen. xxv. 11-28. tion' is as important in connection with home life as it is with anything else, and those are most likely to meet all such difficulties successfully who *watch* that the enemy shall not take occasion to lead them astray, and who *pray* for needed grace daily to do the will of God.

II

THE BIRTHRIGHT

GEN. xxv. 29-34.

29. And Jacob sod pottage : and Esau came from the field, and he *was* faint :

30. And Esau said to Jacob, Feed me, I pray thee, with that same red *pottage* ; for I *am* faint : therefore was his name called Edom

31. And Jacob said, Sell me this day thy birthright.

32. And Esau said, Behold, I *am* at the point to die ; and what profit shall this birthright do to me ?

33. And Jacob said, Swear to me this day ; and he swore unto him : and he sold his birthright unto Jacob.

34. Then Jacob gave Esau bread and pottage of lentils ; and he did eat and drink, and rose up, and went his way : thus Esau despised *his* birthright.

THE revelation of the Divine will concerning the Gen. xxv. two brothers (ver. 23) was evidently no 29-34. secret. It is clear that both Esau and Jacob knew of it. This fact is in some respects the key to the true interpretation of this incident.

I. *The Bargain of the Brothers.*—The contrast I. The Bargain of the Brothers. in appearance which marked the two boys was continued in their characters as men. Their daily pursuits were expressive of their natures and temperaments. Esau comes in one day from hunting tired and hungry. The savour of the pottage is enticing, and the hungry and weary man

Genesis xxv. 11—xxxvi. 8

Gen. xxv. 29-34. cries out to his brother to feed him with that red stuff of which he does not even know the name. Now is Jacob's opportunity, for which he has probably been waiting. He had doubtless already taken his brother's measure and knew how to deal with him, and so he proposes a bargain: 'Sell me this day thy birthright.' The birthright seems to have included temporal and spiritual blessings; it carried with it a double portion of the paternal inheritance (Deut. xxi. 17; 1 Chron. v. 1, 2); it gave the holder precedence as head of the family or tribe; above all, it constituted the possessor priest and spiritual head of his people. All this Jacob evidently knew, and in the light of what God had said to his mother he already appreciated the value of the birthright.

Esau's Indifference.

It is not at all improbable that long before this moment Esau had learned to set little store by the family privileges which belonged to him as the first-born son. To him the position and opportunity meant little or nothing; and now he impulsively cries out that as the birthright is of no profit to him, since he is at the point of death, he is willing to sell it for a meal of red lentils. It seems clear from the narrative that there was no likelihood whatever of his dying for want of food. The words are expressive of his utter disregard of and indifference to the position and privileges associated with the birthright.

Jacob's Shrewdness.

Jacob, knowing his brother's weakness and bearing in mind the issues involved in the transaction, calls upon Esau to take a solemn oath. This Esau is

The Birthright

quite ready to do, and so the transaction is closed. Gen. xxv. He sold his birthright and in return received the meal that he so eagerly desired. "Thus Esau despised his birthright." In these few words we have the illuminating touch which explains the whole position. This was no sudden impulse on the part of Esau, just as it was no sudden brilliant idea on the part of Jacob. On the one hand, there was the attitude of despising the birthright and on the other the attitude of full appreciation. These things do not spring up suddenly and at once; they are plants of longer growth. It is this fact that compels us to go beneath the surface and try to discover the explanation of both sides of the transaction.

II. *The Characters of the Brothers.*—On the surface of the story Esau is a good specimen of the man of the world—frank, warm-hearted, and every inch a man. There is a superficial attractiveness about him, and we easily dub him a fine fellow. In reality, however, he was at once sensuous and sensual. The one word 'profane' (Heb. xii. 16) in its literal meaning sums up his character. It comes from *pro-fanum*, 'outside the temple,' and refers to that plot of ground just in front of the fane which was common to everyone, as being outside the sacred enclosure. Gradually the word came to mean that which was purely earthly and common, as opposed to that which was sacred, consecrated, and dedicated to God. Esau's life was entirely earth-bound. God was not in all his thoughts. He was intent only on present gratification, and set no value on the Divine gifts.

II. The
Characters
of the
Brothers.

Genesis xxv. 11—xxxvi. 8

Gen. xxv. 29-34. To him future blessings were intangible and unreal, and as he thought he was going to die he did not see any reason why he should grasp at blessings which could never be personally enjoyed. Everything about the present was real to him, while everything about the future was unreal, vague, and misty; and so, whatever we may say about Jacob's part in the transaction, Esau cannot be exculpated. So far from being an injured man he really supplanted himself. To him this world was everything and God nothing.

**Esau's
Character.**

'He is the kind of man of whom we are in the habit of charitably saying that he is nobody's enemy but his own. But, in truth, he is God's enemy, because he wastes the splendid manhood which God has given him. Passionate, impatient, impulsive, incapable of looking before him, refusing to estimate the worth of anything which does not immediately appeal to his senses, preferring the animal to the spiritual, he is rightly called a 'profane person.' 'Alas!' while the body is so broad and brawny, must the soul lie blinded, dwarfed, stupefied, almost annihilated?' (Carlyle).'¹

**Jacob's
Character.**

Jacob's character, on the other hand, was unattractive and even repulsive on the surface. He was cool and calculating, could hold his appetites and desires in check, and wait—if necessary for years—for the accomplishment of his purpose. He evidently knew his brother well, and had been watching his opportunity. When the psychological

¹ Strachan, *Hebrew Ideals*, p. 23.

The Birthright

moment came he took advantage of it at once. **Gen. xxv. 29-34.** All this tends to repel us from the man as unworthy and contemptible, and no one for a moment can doubt that his crafty and subtle method was in every way objectionable and deplorable. And yet underneath the surface there was not a little in him of an entirely opposite character. He had a keen and true appreciation of that which Esau despised. He realized the spiritual nature of the birthright; and though we utterly object to the method by which he attempted to obtain it we must never forget that his object was good, and that he desired to obtain that which he knew God intended for him. Thus **Jacob's Constancy.** Jacob was appreciative of the spiritual meaning of the birthright, and was at any rate to some extent truly sensitive to the Divine word. He wanted spiritual blessings, even though he went the wrong way to obtain them. He also shines out in contrast with his brother in his constancy. Esau was one of the most inconstant of men, everything by turns and nothing long, a shallow nature full of impulse and ungoverned feelings; to-day despising his birthright, to-morrow wanting it back; to day absolutely indifferent, to-morrow sorrowing over his loss. Jacob on the other hand was tenacious and persistent, and possessed a reserve of strength which, even though it was often directed into wrong channels, was in itself one of the most valuable features of human life.

Thus while superficially we are attracted to Esau **The True Natures.** and repelled by Jacob, as we penetrate towards the depth of their characters we see the true natures of

Genesis xxv. 11—xxxvi. 8

Gen. xxv. the brothers and their differences of attitude to and
29-34. outlook on life and things spiritual.

Suggestions
for Medita-
tion.

Personal
Character.

1. *Lessons from Esau.*—(a) The real proof of life is personal character. It was the act in Esau's case that revealed the true state of affairs and showed what he was. We see in him 'that inexorable law of human souls, that we are preparing ourselves for sudden deeds by the reiterated choice of good or evil that gradually determines character' (George Eliot). No one becomes base all at once, and we may be perfectly sure that Esau's character had already deteriorated before he made this choice. Character is continually growing, and when the crisis comes we act, not solely according to what we wish at the moment, but according to what we really are, for our wishes are the expressions of our actual character. Esau possessed no spiritual insight, no appreciation whatever of the blessings of the great Abrahamic covenant. He cared only for this life and for present enjoyment. The result was that when the test came the true man was revealed. According as he had lived previously, so his character showed itself.

'The tissues of the life to be
We weave with colours all our own;
And in the field of Destiny
We reap as we have sown.'

Little
Things.

(b) The supreme test of character is found in little things. It seemed but a small matter, a feeling of hunger and a desire for food, and yet it was the means of testing and revealing Esau's

The Birthright

real character. It is a sad and solemn picture, a strong man who cannot wait a moment for food and cries out to be fed. How often in history have insignificant events been turning points of human lives! We are tested more by trifles than by great crises. Many men can shine in emergencies who are not able to stand the test of faithfulness in little things.

(c) The imperative necessity in life is to subdue the flesh to the spirit. Esau failed to see, because he had lost the power to see, that the mind and soul need food as well as the body. And if life is 'harmony with environment,' then nothing purely physical can nourish the soul. It is only too easy to crush and kill our higher aspirations by undue attention to the demands of our lower nature. This is true not only of the purely earth-bound like Esau, but also of great and noble natures like Darwin's, who by absorption in intellectual pursuits become atrophied in taste and feeling. No part of our complex nature must remain unnourished, but we must see to it that physical and even intellectual enjoyments do not dwarf and eventually kill the spiritual side of our being. When the animal and spiritual collide, it will involve sacrifice if the spiritual is to be considered. The little girl's explanation of St Paul 'keeping under his body' was not far wrong: 'by keeping his soul *on top*.'

(d) The one thing needful is to put God first in our life. So far as we can see, God had no place in the life of Esau. With all his bodily vigour and general attractiveness there was one part of his

Genesis xxv. 11—xxxvi. 8

Gen. xxv. 29-34. nature entirely uncultivated. He was God-less. He lived for the present, not for the future; for things physical, not spiritual; for time, not eternity. In this he is like many men to-day. They have everything that this world can give—wealth, money, natural powers, position—everything but God. And yet, with all their advantages, they must necessarily fail. ‘In the beginning God.’ And when God is first, then all else finds its place—purpose, power, and perpetual peace and progress.

Lessons
from Jacob.

2. *Lessons from Jacob.*—(a) The necessity of right principle. Jacob’s purpose in desiring the birthright was undoubtedly genuine and exemplary, but the way in which he went to work to obtain the birthright was in every way deplorable and wrong. He was one of the earliest, but unfortunately has not been by any means the last, of those who have considered that the end justifies the means. This is one of the deadliest foes of true living. The end does *not* justify the means; and right ends must always be accomplished by right means, or else left unaccomplished.

Principle
Essential.

Waiting
for God.

(b) The value of waiting for God. If only Jacob had been willing to wait God’s time and way, what a difference it would have made to him! The birthright would have been his in any case, but he was unwilling to allow God to give it to him. How like we are to Jacob in this respect! We take God at His word, and yet we will not wait God’s time; and the result is we bring untold sorrow and trouble upon ourselves and others. It is essential that we keep in view the two requirements of the

The Birthright

true life, *faith and patience* (Heb. vi.). It is not **Gen. xxv.** enough to believe what God has said; we must **29-34.** 'wait patiently for Him.'

(c) The certainty of righteous retribution. We **Certainty of Retribution.** must never forget that God permitted Jacob no possession of the birthright until he had first of all acknowledged Esau as his lord (Gen. xxxii. 4, 5 *ff.*), and had renounced all claim to it as the result of this evil bargain. He did not enter upon the birthright until it came quite naturally into his possession after Esau had abandoned it (Gen. xxxvi. 6). How different his life would have been if only he had believed that God was able to carry out His purposes unaided—at least, unaided by cleverness and deceit!

(d) The conclusion of the whole matter is that **God Supreme.** the only guarantee of true living is God in the heart and life as absolutely and permanently supreme. When God dwells in the heart as Saviour, in the conscience as Master, in the life as Lord, then—and only then—do we become assured of the possession of God's spiritual birthright and of its enjoyment in God's own way.

III

ISAAC

GEN. xxvi. 1-33

1. And there was a famine in the land, beside the first famine that was in the days of Abraham. And Isaac went unto Abimelech king of the Philistines unto Gerar.

2. And the Lord appeared unto him, and said, Go not down into Egypt; dwell in the land which I shall tell thee of:

3. Sojourn in this land, and I will be with thee, and will bless thee; for unto thee, and unto thy seed, I will give all these countries, and I will perform the oath which I swore unto Abraham thy father;

4. And I will make thy seed to multiply as the stars of heaven, and will give unto thy seed all these countries; and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed;

5. Because that Abraham obeyed my voice, and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws.

6. And Isaac dwelt in Gerar;

7. And the men of the place asked *him* of his wife; and he said, *She is my sister*: for he feared to say, *She is my wife*; lest, *said he*, the men of the place should kill me for Rebekah; because she *was* fair to look upon.

8. And it came to pass, when he had been there a long time, that Abimelech king of the Philistines looked out at a window, and saw, and, behold, Isaac *was* sporting with Rebekah his wife.

9. And Abimelech called Isaac, and said, Behold, of a surety she is thy wife: and how saidst thou, *She is my sister*? And Isaac said unto him, Because I said, Lest I die for her.

10. And Abimelech said, What is this thou hast done unto us? one of the people might lightly have lien with thy wife, and thou shouldst have brought guiltiness upon us.

11. And Abimelech charged all *his* people, saying, He that toucheth this man or his wife shall surely be put to death.

12. Then Isaac sowed in that land, and received in the same year an hundredfold: and the Lord blessed him.

Isaac

13. And the man waxed great, and went forward, and grew until he became very great :

14. For he had possession of flocks, and possession of herds, and great store of servants : and the Philistines envied him.

15. For all the wells which his father's servants had digged in the days of Abraham his father, the Philistines had stopped them, and filled them with earth.

16. And Abimelech said unto Isaac, Go from us ; for thou art much mightier than we.

17. And Isaac departed thence, and pitched his tent in the valley of Gerar, and dwelt there.

18. And Isaac digged again the wells of water, which they had digged in the days of Abraham his father ; for the Philistines had stopped them after the death of Abraham : and he called their names after the names by which his father had called them.

19. And Isaac's servants digged in the valley, and found there a well of springing water.

20. And the herdman of Gerar did strive with Isaac's herdmen, saying, The water is our's : and he called the name of the well Esek ; because they strove with him.

21. And they digged another well, and strove for that also : and he called the name of it Sitnah.

22. And he removed from thence, and digged another well ; and for that they strove not : and he called the name of it Rehoboth ; and he said, For now the Lord hath made room for us, and we shall be fruitful in the land.

23. And he went up from thence to Beer-sheba.

24. And the Lord appeared unto him the same night, and said, I *am* the God of Abraham, thy father : fear not, for I *am* with thee, and will bless thee, and multiply thy seed for my servant Abraham's sake.

25. And he builded an altar there, and called upon the name of the Lord, and pitched his tent there : and there Isaac's servants digged a well.

26. And Abimelech went to him from Gerar, and Ahuzzath one of his friends, and Phichol the chief captain of his army.

27. And Isaac said unto them, Wherefore come ye to me, seeing ye hate me, and have sent me away from you ?

28. And they said, We saw certainly that the Lord was with thee : and we said, Let there be now an oath betwixt us, *even* betwixt us and thee, and let us make a covenant with thee ;

29. That thou wilt do us no hurt, as we have not touched thee, and as we have done unto thee nothing but good, and have sent thee away in peace : thou *art* now the blessed of the Lord.

30. And he made them a feast, and they did eat and drink.

31. And they rose up betimes in the morning, and swore one

Genesis xxv. 11—xxxvi. 8

to another: and Isaac sent them away, and they departed from him in peace.

32. And it came to pass the same day, that Isaac's servants came, and told him concerning the well which they had digged, and said unto him, We have found water.

33. And he called it Shebah: therefore the name of the city is Beer-sheba unto this day.

Gen. xxvi.
1-33.

ALTHOUGH Isaac lived the longest of all the patriarchs less is recorded of him than of the others. This is the only chapter exclusively devoted to his life. His was a quiet, peaceful, normal life. He was the ordinary son of a great father, and the ordinary father of a great son. We are accustomed to speak of such lives as commonplace and ordinary, and yet the ordinary life is the 'ordered' life, and in the truest sense the 'ordained' life. Like the rest of us, Isaac's experiences were marked by light and shade, by sin and discipline, by grace and mercy. The chapter before us is full of illustrations of how difficulties should and should not be met.

I. Difficulty
met by
Divine
Guidance
(vers. 1-5).

I. *Difficulty met by Divine Guidance* (vers. 1-5).
—Once again there arose a famine in the land of Canaan and the difficulty about food quickly became urgent with Isaac and his large household. Trials are permitted to come into the life of the best and holiest of men, and it is by this means that God sometimes teaches His most precious lessons. As the result of this famine Isaac left his home and journeyed southwards into the land of the Philistines to Gerar. The question naturally arises whether he was right in taking this journey, whether he had consulted God about it, whether it

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was undertaken by the will of God, or prompted **Gen. xxvi.** by his own unaided wisdom. In any case the Lord **I-33.** appeared to him and prevented him from going further southward into Egypt as his father had done under similar circumstances. 'Go not down into Egypt.' Egypt was not the promised land, and there were dangers there to body and to soul from which it was necessary that Isaac should be safeguarded. With the prohibition came the definite Divine instruction to remain in the land of Canaan, and the promises to his father Abraham were thereupon repeated and confirmed. Careful study should be made of the various occasions on which the Divine promise was given to Abraham, and then a comparison should be instituted with these words to Isaac. It will then be seen that each time there is some new feature of the Divine revelation and a confirmation of the Divine promise. It is impossible to avoid asking the question whether in view of the sequel Isaac was right in going even as far as to Gerar. It would almost seem as though he had been walking by sight rather than by faith and had not consulted God before starting out from home.

II. *Difficulty met by Human Sin* (vers. 6-11).— II. *Difficulty met by Human Sin* (vers. 6-11). Isaac continued to dwell in Gerar and it was not very long before he was asked by the inhabitants of the place about his wife. Following his father's evil example he told a deliberate lie and said, 'She is my sister.' In this he was actuated by cowardly fear and by deplorable selfishness; 'Lest the men of the place should kill me for Rebekah.' It is some-

Genesis xxv. 11—xxxvi. 8

Gen. xxvi. 1-33. times wondered how it was that Isaac did exactly what his father before him had done, and the similarity of the circumstances has led some to think that this is only a variant of the former story. Would it not be truer to say that this episode is entirely consonant with what we know of human nature and its tendencies? What would be more natural than that Isaac should attempt to do what his father had done before him? Surely a little knowledge of human nature as distinct from abstract theory is sufficient to warrant a belief in the historical character of this narrative. Besides, assuming that it is a variant of the other story, we naturally ask which of them is the true version; they cannot both be true, for as they now are they do not refer to the same event. The names and circumstances are different in spite of similarities.

**Rebuke by
a Heathen.**

This belief in Rebekah as Isaac's sister was evidently held by the people of Gerar for some time, for it was only after Isaac had been there 'a long time' that the King of the Philistines detected the sin and became convinced that Isaac and Rebekah were husband and wife. Like his predecessor before him Abimelech was a man of uprightness, for he very plainly rebuked Isaac and reminded him of the serious consequences that might have accrued to him and to Rebekah if the facts of the case had not become known. Is there anything sadder in this world than that a child of God should be rebuked by a man of the world? The corruption of the best is indeed the worst, and when a believer sins and his sin has to be pointed out to him by

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men who make no profession whatever of religion, **Gen. xxvi. I-33.** this is indeed to sound the depths of sorrow and disappointment. Abimelech took immediate steps to prevent any harm coming to Isaac and Rebekah from what had been done, and it is not difficult to imagine Isaac's feelings as he realised the results of his deliberate untruth.

III. *Difficulty met by Divine Blessing* (vers. 12-17).—Isaac still lived on at Gerar, and quite naturally occupied himself with his daily agricultural work. He sowed seed, and in the very same year received an hundredfold owing to the blessing of the Lord. This was an exceptional result even for that exceptional land, and the Divine blessing is of course the explanation. Not only so, but his flocks grew and his household increased more and more 'until he became very great.' This marked Divine blessing following soon after his deliberate sin is at first sight a difficulty, for we naturally ask how God's favour could possibly rest upon him so quickly after the discovery of his grievous error. The answer may be found in a somewhat frequent experience of the people of God. They are often permitted to receive publicly a measure, and a great measure, of the Divine blessing even when they may not be in private fully faithful to the Divine will. God may at times honour His people in the sight of men while dealing with them in secret on account of their sins. As Richard Cecil once said, 'A minister of Christ is often in highest honour of men for the performance of one half of his work, while God is regarding him with displeasure for the neglect of

III. Diffi-
culty met by
Divine
Blessing
(vers. 12-17).

Genesis xxv. 11—xxxvi. 8

Gen. xxvi. the other half.' It seems to have been something like this with Isaac. In the presence of his enemies the Philistines God indeed 'prepared a table' before him, but it is pretty evident from what follows that God had other ways of dealing with him on account of his sin. God may not suffer His servants to be dishonoured before the world, but He will take care to discipline them in faithfulness, and even with severity in the secret of His fellowship with them.

Prosperity
and
Envy.

This prosperity soon had its inevitable outcome. 'The Philistines envied him,' and this envy was shown in what was perhaps the severest and most trying way. 'All the wells which his father's servants had digged in the days of Abraham his father, the Philistines had stopped them and filled them with earth.' The digging of wells was a virtual claim to the possession of the land, and it was this in particular that the Philistines resented. They were not prepared to allow Isaac to regard himself as in any sense the owner of this property, and they therefore made it difficult and even impossible for him to remain there. Water especially for such a household as his was an absolute necessity, and the stopping up of the wells compelled him to take action. Abimelech too was not happy about this increasing property, and begged Isaac to depart, saying that he was mightier than the Philistines. Isaac thereupon departed, and yet even then did not go back to his own home, but remained in the valley of Gerar and dwelt there. Once again we cannot help feeling conscious that Isaac was not

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exercising sufficient faith in the power of his father's God, or he would never have remained so near Gerar in the land of the Philistines. **Gen. xxvi. 1-33.**

IV. *Difficulty met by Human Patience* (vers. 18-22).
—This reluctance to go far away soon had its effect. Isaac was necessarily compelled to dig again the wells of water that had been stopped up, but this was at once met by a strife with the herdmen of Gerar for the possession of the wells. Again Isaac's herdmen dug a well, and the men of Gerar strove for that also. All this was evidently intended to make things uncomfortable for Isaac until he should be willing to return to his own home. Compelled by circumstances to make another move, a third attempt was made at well-digging, and at length the people of Gerar did not continue to strive. This was regarded by Isaac as a mark of Divine favour. 'He called the name of it Rehoboth; and he said, For now the Lord hath made room for us, and we shall be fruitful in the land.' The spirit of yielding is very noteworthy, more particularly as peacemakers are very rare in the East. A strife of this kind is scarcely ever likely to be met by such a spirit of willingness to yield. On the contrary, there is every likelihood of such action leading to further strife and insistence upon personal rights. God was at work gently but very definitely leading Isaac back again to his own home.

V. *Difficulty met by Divine Favour* (vers. 23-33).
—At length Isaac was impelled, not to say compelled, to leave the land of the Philistines, 'and he went up from thence to Beersheba.' Let us observe

Genesis xxv. 11—xxxvi. 8

Gen. xxvi. carefully what follows these words. They are very striking and significant. 'The Lord appeared unto him *the same night.*' Does not this show clearly that God never meant him to go even to Gerar? By this Divine appearance 'the same night' it is evident that Isaac was at last in line with God's will, and could receive a Divine revelation. 'I am the God of Abraham thy father: fear not, for I am with thee, and will bless thee, and multiply thy seed for My servant Abraham's sake.' This is the first time that we have the now familiar title, 'the God of Abraham.' Isaac is told not to fear, that he can rely upon the Divine presence and blessing, and upon the fulfilment of the promise to his father Abraham. When God's servants get right with Him they are certain to receive His full revelation of truth and grace. 'The secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him, and He will show them His covenant.'

**Response to
Revelation.**

Isaac at once responded to this Divine revelation. 'He builded an altar there, and called upon the Name of the Lord, and pitched his tent there: and there Isaac's servants digged a well.' Let us mark carefully these four stages in the patriarch's restored life. First comes the altar with its thought of consecration, then prayer with its consciousness of need, then the tent with its witness to home, and then comes the well with its testimony to daily life and needs. The altar and the home sum up everything that is true in life. First the altar and then the home, not first the home and then the altar. God must be first in everything.

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Personal blessing from God and the consciousness of a life right with God were not the only result of Isaac's return to Beersheba. 'Then Abimelech went to him from Gerar.' The point of time is very noteworthy, '*Then* Abimelech went,' that is, when Isaac had returned to the pathway of God's will, those who were formerly his enemies came to him and bore their testimony to the presence of God with him. Isaac naturally asked why they had come, seeing that they had sent him away from them. Their reply is very significant, 'We saw plainly that the Lord was with thee . . . thou art now the blessed of the Lord.' How true it is that 'when a man's ways please the Lord He maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him.' It is scarcely possible to doubt in view of all these verses record that Isaac ought never to have left his home, but should have trusted God to keep him in spite of the famine in the land. But at last he was right with God, and both Divine favour and human acceptance wait upon him. He responded with alacrity to the desire of Abimelech for a covenant of peace, and after a feast of fellowship his visitors departed from him in peace. When God is honoured by man, man is always honoured by God.

Testimony
to Divine
Blessing.

Isaac's life, as recorded in this chapter, is full of simple yet searching lessons for people who, like him, are called upon to live ordinary, every-day lives.

Suggestions
for Medita-
tion.

1. *The Secret of true living is here revealed.*— True living. God must at all costs be first. Divine revelation

Genesis xxv. 11—xxxvi. 8

Gen. xxvi. 1-33. is the foundation of all true life, and Divine guidance is its only safety. Not a step must be taken without His direction, not a work undertaken without His grace and blessing. 'In the beginning God' must actuate and dominate every life that seeks to live to His glory. It is a profound mistake to think that we need only concern ourselves with God's will in the great events, the crises of life. The story of Isaac shows with unmistakable clearness that there is nothing too trivial for God's guidance, and nothing too small for the need of His grace and power.

**Strength of
Character.**

2. *The need of strength of character is here emphasised.*—There is always a very serious peril in being the son of a great father. Life is apt to be made too easy, and the son often occupies his father's position without having had his father's experience. Isaac entered upon his inheritance without having passed through the various ways of discipline that Abraham experienced, and the result was that things were so easy for him that he did not realise the need of individuality of character and definite personal assertion of himself in the Divine life. In opening the wells that had been filled up he was copying Abraham's example without obtaining Abraham's success, and he was doubtless thereby taught that it was necessary for him to have a personal hold on God and duty for himself instead of merely imitating what his father had done. It is always dangerous when life is made too simple and easy for young people; 'it is good for a man to bear the yoke in his youth,' and

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it was the absence of this yoke that doubtless ministered in great measure to that weakness of character which seems to have marked Isaac almost throughout his whole life. Gen. xxvi.
I-33.

3. *The importance of separation from the world is here seen.*—As long as Isaac was in or near Gerar he did not experience much happiness. He was envied, thwarted, and opposed by the jealous Philistines. He was wanting not only in happiness but also in power, for it was not until he returned to Beersheba that Abimelech came to him bearing testimony to his conviction that God was with Isaac and blessing him. Thus for happiness, comfort and power with others, separation from the world is an absolute necessity. There is no greater mistake possible than to imagine that we can be one with the world and yet influence them for Christ. Lot found out this mistake to his cost, and so it has ever been. Separation from the world, paradoxical though it may seem, is the only true way of influencing the world for Christ. We must be in the world but not of the world if we would glorify God, bring blessing to our own souls, and be the means of blessing to others. Separation
from the
World.

IV. *The spirit of meekness is here illustrated.*—It is noteworthy that all through his life Isaac's temperament was of a passive rather than of an active nature. During his childhood he was subject to the insults of Ishmael, in his manhood he was taken to Moriah and bound there for sacrifice, and a wife was chosen for him by his father. He accepted the rebuke of Abimelech with meekness, he and Spirit of
Meekness.

Genesis xxv. 11—xxxvi. 8

Gen. xxvi. 1-33. his servants yielded to the Philistines about the well, and in his later life we can see the same spirit of passive yielding in his relations with Rebekah and his two sons. And yet in spite of all this meekness the Philistines testified to him as a man of power and might, and begged that he would not do them any harm. What a testimony this is to the spirit of true gentleness and meekness. The world thinks very little of meekness, but it is one of the prime graces of Christianity. 'Let your sweet reasonableness be known unto all men' is the apostolic word echoing the Master's beatitude, 'Blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth.' Not only so, but this meekness is an echo of God's own life, for does not the Psalmist say 'Thy gentleness hath made me great'? As the French aphorism truly says, *La douceur est une force*. Meekness means the self-sacrifice of our own desires and interests, and in this spirit of gentleness is the secret of truest character and finest victory over self and others. Egoism is always a cause of weakness, for a constant consideration of ourselves is so absorbing that it tends to rob us of the very finest powers of our character. On the other hand, as we cease to regard self and concentrate attention upon others we find our own character becoming stronger as it becomes more unselfish, and with that is quickly added influence over others, and a beautiful recommendation of the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

'Blessed are
the Meek.'

IV

THE BLESSING

GEN. xxvii. 1-40

1. And it came to pass, that when Isaac was old, and his eyes were dim, so that he could not see, he called Esau his eldest son, and said unto him, My son : and he said unto him, Behold, *here am I*.

2. And he said, Behold now, I am old, I know not the day of my death :

3. Now therefore take, I pray thee, thy weapons, thy quiver and thy bow, and go out to the field, and take me *some* venison ;

4. And make me savoury meat, such as I love, and bring *it* to me, that I may eat ; that my soul may bless thee before I die.

5. And Rebekah heard when Isaac spake to Esau his son. And Esau went to the field to hunt *for* venison, *and* to bring *it*.

6. And Rebekah spake unto Jacob her son, saying, Behold, I heard thy father speak unto Esau thy brother, saying,

7. Bring me venison, and make me savoury meat, that I may eat, and bless thee before the Lord before my death.

8. Now therefore, my son, obey my voice according to that which I command thee.

9. Go now to the flock, and fetch me from thence two good kids of the goats ; and I will make them savoury meat for thy father, such as he loveth :

10. And thou shalt bring *it* to thy father, that he may eat, and that he may bless thee before his death.

11. And Jacob said to Rebekah his mother, Behold, Esau my brother *is* a hairy man, and I *am* a smooth man :

12. My father peradventure will feel me, and I shall seem to him as a deceiver ; and I shall bring a curse upon me, and not a blessing.

13. And his mother said unto him, Upon me *be* thy curse, my son : only obey my voice, and go fetch me *them*.

14. And he went, and fetched, and brought *them* to his

Genesis xxv. 11—xxxvi. 8

mother : and his mother made savoury meat, such as his father loved.

15. And Rebekah took goodly raiment of her eldest son Esau, which *were* with her in the house, and put them upon Jacob her younger son :

16. And she put the skins of the kids of the goats upon his hands, and upon the smooth of his neck :

17. And she gave the savoury meat and the bread, which she had prepared, into the hand of her son Jacob.

18. And he came unto his father, and said, My father : and he said, Here *am* I ; who *art* thou, my son ?

19. And Jacob said unto his father, I *am* Esau thy firstborn ; I have done according as thou badest me : arise, I pray thee, sit and eat of my venison, that thy soul may bless me.

20. And Isaac said unto his son, How *is it* that thou hast found *it* so quickly, my son ? And he said, Because the Lord thy God brought *it* to me.

21. And Isaac said unto Jacob, Come near, I pray thee, that I may feel thee, my son, whether thou *be* my very son Esau or not.

22. And Jacob went near unto Isaac his father ; and he felt him, and said, The voice *is* Jacob's voice, but the hands *are* the hands of Esau.

23. And he discerned him not, because his hands were hairy, as his brother Esau's hands : so he blessed him.

24. And he said, *Art* thou my very son Esau ? And he said, I *am*.

25. And he said, Bring *it* near to me, and I will eat of my son's venison, that my soul may bless thee. And he brought *it* near to him, and he did eat : and he brought him wine, and he drank.

26. And his father Isaac said unto him, Come near now, and kiss me, my son.

27. And he came near, and kissed him : and he smelled the smell of his raiment, and blessed him, and said, See, the smell of my son *is*'as the smell of a field which the Lord hath blessed :

28. Therefore God give thee of the dew of heaven, and the fatness of the earth, and plenty of corn and wine :

29. Let people serve thee, and nations bow down to thee : be lord over thy brethren, and let thy mother's sons bow down to thee : cursed *be* every one that curseth thee, and blessed *be* he that blesseth thee.

30. And it came to pass, as soon as Isaac had made an end of blessing Jacob, and Jacob was yet scarce gone out from the presence of Isaac his father, that Esau his brother came in from his hunting.

31. And he also had made savoury meat, and brought it unto his father, and said unto his father, Let my father arise, and eat of his son's venison, that thy soul may bless me.

The Blessing

32. And Isaac his father said unto him, *Who art thou?* And he said, *I am thy son, thy firstborn Esau.*

33. And Isaac trembled very exceedingly, and said, *Who? where is he that hath taken venison, and brought it me, and I have eaten of all before thou camest, and have blessed him? yea, and he shall be blessed.*

34. And when Esau heard the words of his father, he cried with a great and exceeding bitter cry, and said unto his father, *Bless me, even me also, O my father!*

35. And he said, *Thy brother came with subtilty, and hath taken away thy blessing.*

36. And he said, *Is not he rightly named Jacob? for he hath supplanted me these two times: he took away my birthright; and, behold, now he hath taken away my blessing. And he said, Hast thou not reserved a blessing for me?*

37. And Isaac answered and said unto Esau, *Behold, I have made him thy lord, and all his brethren have I given to him for servants; and with corn and wine have I sustained him: and what shall I do now unto thee, my son?*

38. And Esau said unto his father, *Hast thou but one blessing, my father? bless me, even me also, O my father!* And Esau lifted up his voice, and wept.

39. And Isaac his father answered, and said unto him, *Behold, thy dwelling shall be the fatness of the earth, and of the dew of heaven from above;*

40. And by thy sword shalt thou live, and shalt serve thy brother; and it shall come to pass when thou shalt have the dominion, that thou shalt break his yoke from off thy neck.

NOWHERE, perhaps, is the real character of **Gen.**
the Bible more evident than in this chapter. **xxvii.1-40.**
The story is given in all its naked simplicity, and, although no precise moral is pointed, the incidents carry their own solemn lesson to every reader. All four persons concerned with the history are portrayed without hesitation or qualification, and the narrative makes its profound impression upon the reader by its simple but significant recital of facts. It is an unpleasant picture that we have here presented to us, a family life full of jealousy and deceit. If love is not found in the home, where may we expect it? And if, in particular, jealousies are

Genesis xxv. 11—xxxvi. 8

Gen. found associated with the profession of faith in
xxvii.1-40. God, how terrible is the revelation!

I. The
Father's Plot
(vers. 1-4).

I. *The Father's Plot* (vers. 1-4).—Isaac's part in the history here recorded is sometimes overlooked, and yet it is evident that he was in large measure responsible for the sad results. In the time of old age he calls his elder son and speaks of his own approaching death, inviting his son to prepare food that he may eat, and at the same time give his elder son the parental and patriarchal blessing. There does not seem to have been any real sign of approaching death, and, as a matter of fact, Isaac lived for over forty years after this event. The hurry and secrecy which characterised his action are also suspicious, and not the least of the sad and deplorable elements is the association of old age with feasting, personal gratification, and self-will. It is perfectly clear that he knew of the purposes of God concerning his younger son (xxv. 23), and yet here we find him endeavouring to thwart that purpose by transferring the blessing from the one for whom it was divinely designed. This partiality for Esau, combined with his own fleshly appetite, led the patriarch into grievous sin, and we cannot but observe how his action set fire to the whole train of evils that followed in the wake of his proposal.

Esau was quite ready to fall in with his father's suggestion. He must have at once recalled the transaction with his brother whereby the birthright had been handed over to Jacob. He must also have known the Divine purpose concerning him

The Blessing

and his brother; and although his marriage with a Canaanitish woman had still further disqualified him for spiritual primogeniture, it mattered nothing so long as he could recover what he now desired to have. He realised at last the value of that which his brother had obtained from him, and he is prompt to respond to his father's suggestion, since he sees in it the very opportunity of regaining the lost birthright. **Gen. xxvii.1-40.**

II. *The Mother's Counter-Plot* (vers. 5-17).—We have now to observe with equal care the part played by Rebekah. Isaac had evidently not counted on his wife's overhearing his proposal to Esau, nor had he thought of the possibility of her astuteness vanquishing his plot. It is necessary that we should be perfectly clear about Rebekah's part in this transaction. Her object was to preserve for Jacob the blessing that God intended for him. Her design, therefore, was perfectly legitimate, and there can be very little doubt that it was inspired by a truly religious motive. She thought that the purpose of God was in danger, and that there was no other way of preventing a great wrong being done. It was a crisis in her life and in that of Jacob, and she was prepared to go the entire length of enduring the Divine curse so long as her favourite son could retain the blessing that God intended for him. Yet when all this is said, and it should be continually borne in mind, the sin of Rebekah's act was utterly inexcusable. We may account for it, but we cannot justify it. She was one of those who take upon themselves to regard God as unable

II. The Mother's Counter-Plot (vers. 5-17).

Genesis xxv. 11—xxxvi. 8

Gen. xxvii. 1-40. to carry out His own purposes, thinking that either He has forgotten, or else that His will can really be frustrated by human craft and sin. And so she dared to do this remarkably bold thing. She proved herself to be quite as clever as Isaac and Esau.

Jacob's compliance was not immediate and hearty, for he evidently perceived the very real risk that he was running (ver. 12). He also saw the sin of it in the sight of God, and feared lest after all he should bring upon himself the Divine curse instead of the Divine blessing. Yet, influenced and overpowered by the stronger nature of the mother, he at length accepted the responsibility for this act, and proceeded to carry out his mother's plans.

III. The Younger Son's Deception (vers. 18-29).

III. *The Younger Son's Deception* (vers. 18-29).—The preparations were quickly and skilfully made, and Jacob approached his father with the food that his mother has prepared for him. The bold avowal that he was the first-born was persisted in, and his aged father entirely deceived. Lie follows lie, for Jacob had to pay the price of lies by being compelled to lie on still. Nothing in its way is more awful than this deception. We pity Jacob as the victim of his mother's love, but we scorn and deplore his action as the violation of his conscience and the silencing of his better nature. The terrible thoroughness with which he carried out his mother's plans is one of the most hideous features of the whole story.

The father's benediction is now given; and although it is mainly couched in terms of temporal

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blessing, we see underlying it the thought of that **Gen. xxvii. 1-40.** wider influence suggested by the promise of universal blessing given to Abraham and his seed.

IV. *The Elder Son's Defeat* (vers. 30-40).—It was not long before the true state of affairs came out. Isaac must have been astonished at the discovery for more than one reason. He had thought doubtless that in blessing, as he considered, his elder son, he had overreached both Rebekah and Jacob, and now he finds after all that the Divine purpose has been accomplished in spite of his own wilful attempt to divert the promise from Jacob. It is, however, to Isaac's credit that he meekly accepts the inevitable, and is now quite prepared to realise that God's will must be done.

IV. The Elder Son's Defeat (vers. 30-40).

We are not surprised at Esau's behaviour, for we know the true character of the man. His bitter lamentation was due to the mortification he felt at being beaten. His cry of disappointment was probably, if not certainly, due to the fact that he had lost the temporal advantage of the birthright and blessing, not that he had lost the spiritual favour of God associated with it. His indignation at Jacob, like all other anger, is characterised by untruth; for whilst Jacob undoubtedly supplanted him, the taking away of the birthright was as much his own free act as it was due to Jacob's superior cleverness. We cannot help being touched by his tearful request to his father to give him even now a blessing. He realises, when it is too late, what has been done, and although a partial blessing is bestowed upon him it is quite beyond all possibility

Genesis xxv. 11—xxxvi. 8

Gen. that things can be as he had desired them to be.
xxvii. 1-40. Esau had despised his birthright, but, however it came about, he was evidently conscious of the value of the blessing; and when the New Testament tells us that 'he found no place for repentance,' it means, of course, that there was no possibility of undoing what had been accomplished. He found no way to change his father's mind, though he sought earnestly to bring this about (Heb. xii. 17). There is a sense in which the past is utterly irretrievable, and it is only very partially true that 'we may be what we might have been.'

**Suggestions
for Medita-
tion.**

We have been concerned mainly with the four human actors in this family drama, and we have seen how one after another was dealt with; but that which lies behind the entire narrative is the thought of the God who reigns and rules over all. What does God teach us from this whole story?

**Right
Objects and
Right
Means.**

1. 'Let us *not* do evil that good may come.' Right objects must be brought about by right means. It is one of the most remarkable features of human life in all ages that lofty purposes have been associated with the most sordid of methods, and one proof of this is found in that intolerable phrase 'pious fraud.' Yet clearly one of these words always contradicts the other. If a thing is pious it cannot be a fraud; if a thing is a fraud it cannot be pious. We must not convert our opponent by using untruth as an argument, we dare not win victories for Christ by any unworthy efforts. As it has been well said, the heights of gold must not be

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approached by steps of straw. Righteousness can never be laid aside, even though our object is yet more righteousness. In personal life, in home life, in Church life, in endeavours to win men for Christ, in missionary enterprise, in social improvement, and in everything connected with the welfare of humanity we must insist upon absolute righteousness, purity, and truth in our methods, or else we shall bring utter discredit on the cause of our Master and Lord. Gen. xxvii. 1-40.

2. 'Be sure your sin will find you out.' This message is writ large on every line of the story. Sin finds us out. All four found this out to their cost, as we see in the subsequent history of Isaac, Rebekah, Jacob, and Esau. They were never the same afterwards, and their sins in some respects dogged their footsteps all the rest of their days. If only Isaac had realised this at the outset, how much he might have saved himself and his family!

'Oh! what a tangled web we weave,
When first we practise to deceive.'

3. 'Walk in the light as He is in the light.' It has been well said (Eugene Stock, *Lesson Studies in Genesis*) that this chapter is a chapter of desires and devices. Isaac had his desires and devices; so had Rebekah, Jacob, and Esau. Each one of them attempts to accomplish their desires by means of the most unworthy devices; and sorrow, disappointment, trouble were the inevitable result. How different it would have been with them if they had lived in the presence of God! How different it

Walk in the light.

Genesis xxv. 11—xxxvi. 8

Gen. always is with us if, instead of following the devices
xxvii. 1-40. and desires of our own hearts, we are able to say like the Psalmist, 'All my desires are before Thee'! For if only 'we delight ourselves in the Lord' He will give us 'the desires of our hearts.' And as we delight ourselves in Him our desires become His desires, and His desires ours, by the transformation of Divine Grace.

'The Lord reigneth.'

4. 'The Lord reigneth.' This is perhaps the chief and fundamental lesson of the whole story. It is utterly futile to suppose that we can thwart the Divine purpose. 'There are many devices in a man's heart; nevertheless the counsel of the Lord, that shall stand' (Prov. xix. 21). God maketh 'the devices of man to be of none effect' (Psalm xxxiii. 10), and we well know that 'the counsel of the Lord, that shall stand' (Isa. xlvi. 10). Whenever man has attempted to play the part of Providence, the issue has always been disaster. 'A man's heart deviseth his way; but the Lord directeth his steps' (Prov. xvi. 9). The true secret of living is to realise that we are not agents, but only instruments in carrying out the Divine will; and if with all our hearts we truly seek Him, waiting upon Him in prayer, trust, and obedience, we shall find ourselves taken up into the line of His wise providence, used to carry out His purposes, and enabled to live to His glory.

V

AN INTERLUDE

GEN. xxvii. 41—xxviii. 9.

41. And Esau hated Jacob because of the blessing where-with his father blessed him : and Esau said in his heart, The days of mourning for my father are at hand ; then will I slay my brother Jacob.

42. And these words of Esau her elder son were told to Rebekah : and she sent and called Jacob her younger son, and said unto him, Behold, thy brother Esau, as touching thee, doth comfort himself, *purposing* to kill thee.

43. Now therefore, my son, obey my voice ; and arise, flee thou to Laban my brother to Haran ;

44. And tarry with him a few days, until thy brother's fury turn away ;

45. Until thy brother's anger turn away from thee, and he forget *that* which thou hast done to him : then I will send, and fetch thee from thence : why should I be deprived also of you both in one day ?

46. And Rebekah said to Isaac, I am weary of my life because of the daughters of Heth : if Jacob take a wife of the daughters of Heth, such as these *which are* of the daughters of the land, what good shall my life do me ?

1. And Isaac called Jacob, and blessed him, and charged him, and said unto him, Thou shall not take a wife of the daughters of Canaan.

2. Arise, go to Padan-aram, to the house of Bethuel thy mother's father : and take thee a wife from thence of the daughters of Laban thy mother's brother.

3. And God Almighty bless thee, and make thee fruitful, and multiply thee, that thou mayest be a multitude of people ;

4. And give thee the blessing of Abraham, to thee, and to thy seed with thee ; that thou mayest inherit the land wherein thou art a stranger, which God gave unto Abraham.

5. And Isaac sent away Jacob : and he went to Padan-aram

Genesis xxv. 11—xxxvi. 8

unto Laban, son of Bethuel the Syrian, the brother of Rebekah, Jacob's and Esau's mother.

6. When Esau saw that Isaac had blessed Jacob, and sent him away to Padan-aram, to take him a wife from thence; and that as he blessed him he gave him a charge, saying, Thou shalt not take a wife of the daughters of Canaan;

7. And that Jacob obeyed his father and his mother, and was gone to Padan-aram;

8. And Esau seeing that the daughters of Canaan pleased not Isaac his father;

9. Then went Esau unto Ishmael, and took unto the wives which he had Mahalath the daughter of Ishmael Abraham's son, the sister of Nebajoth, to be his wife.

Gen.

xxvii. 41—

xxviii. 9.

THIS section seems to suggest the after-swell of a storm; the waters are pent up, longing to rush forth. After the crisis recorded in the preceding section we notice the actors in the drama evidently impressed and affected by the terrible experiences through which they have passed.

I. Esau's

Anger (vers. 41, 42).

I. *Esau's Anger* (vers. 41, 42).—Mortified at his loss of the blessing, and hating his brother on that account, Esau forms a resolve marked by cold-blooded calculation. He expects the death of his father at no distant date, and makes up his mind to wait for that event and then to kill his brother. He will not cause grief to his father, but he does not allow any feelings for his mother to enter into his project. It is evident from all this that there was no genuine repentance in him. While Isaac meekly accepted the Divine decision Esau was determined not to do so. To him life was nothing so long as he could not get rid of his brother. The words 'comfort himself' (verse 42) show the grim satisfaction that actuated him as he contemplated his brother's murder.

But the days of mourning did not come. His

An Interlude

father lived, and the postponement of the revenge led to the failure of the project. Full of passion and impulse he could not keep his plan to himself, for while at the outset he only spake 'in his heart,' it was not long before the project was heard of by Rebekah.

II. *Rebekah's Plan* (vers. 43-46).—To hear of Esau's determination was to take action, and with characteristic promptitude and vigour she tells Jacob what has happened, at the same time urging him to flee to his uncle at Haran and stay there a short time until his brother's anger should pass away. Rebekah well knew the short-lived passion of her elder son.

This, however, was not all that was in her mind. She saw much further ahead than the few days necessary for the dissipation of Esau's anger. She did not inform Jacob of any deeper project, but in her conversation with Isaac this entirely different idea is brought forward. Rebekah's characteristic cleverness is again in evidence. She is quite at home in all these plans and projects. She will not speak to Isaac of her fears of Esau's murder of Jacob, but she introduces a suggestion about Jacob's marriage which has the desired effect. She tells her husband that she is sore troubled because of Esau's unfortunate marriage with the daughters of Canaan, and she fears still further trouble if Jacob should follow his example. There was no need to suggest to Isaac where Jacob was to go, for he would doubtless remember from whence he had taken his own wife. Rebekah's

Gen. xxvii. 41—
xxviii. 9.

II. Rebekah's Plan
(vers. 43-46).

Genesis xxv. 11—xxxvi. 8

Gen. view of the marriage was assuredly correct, and it
xxvii. 41— is perhaps true to say that there never has been any
xxviii. 9. Divine blessing from mixed marriages between
God's people and people of the world.

Rebekah, however, little knew what she was doing in proposing this scheme to Isaac. It was impossible for her to foresee every contingency. She could outwit her husband and her son, but it would seem as though she had either forgotten or did not know that in Laban she had a brother who was quite her own equal in craft and cleverness. Not for an instant did she imagine that she would never see Jacob again, and that her old age would be bereft of the company of her favourite son. Thus does shrewdness overreach itself, bringing sorrow and trouble upon its own head.

Resourceful-
ness and
Determina-
tion.

It is impossible to take leave of Rebekah without observing once again her remarkable cleverness and masterfulness. She is certainly one of the ablest women whose lives are recorded in Holy Writ. Full of plans and projects, ever impatiently questioning, she is typical of those resourceful people who leave nothing to chance, but take every precaution within their reach to accomplish what they desire to do. From the moment she first comes upon the scene we have suggestive hints of her capacity and power. Her first question is concerned with the great problem of her own acute suffering (xxv. 22). Her resourcefulness and determination are evident all through the story of the last section, while in the passage before us we see on the one hand her fear lest she should

An Interlude

be deprived of both sons (or it may be of husband and favourite son) in one day, and also her intense sorrow and disappointment at the bare possibility of Jacob marrying a wife of whom she herself could not approve. While vigour and capacity are very important, far more important and necessary are patient trust in God and consistent integrity. Most human catastrophes have been brought about by men and women regarding themselves as agents instead of instruments, and by thinking that the world cannot possibly be managed except by their shrewdness and sharp practice. Ability must be consecrated to God if it is to be of real service.

III. *Isaac's Blessing* (vers. 1-5).—Rebekah's suggestion is sufficient to compel Isaac to take action. He accepts the indication of Divine providence, and realises now that Jacob is the real heir of the promise to Abraham. He therefore calls his son, and charges him not to take a wife of the daughters of Canaan, but to go to Padan-aram and take a wife of the daughters of Laban, his mother's brother. Then follows the patriarchal benediction; the blessing of 'God Almighty' is invoked upon him, that title of God which was first revealed to his forefather Abraham (xvii. 1). Added to the blessing is a prayer that God would make him fruitful, and multiply him according to the blessing of Abraham.

It is touching to realise that Isaac lived over fifty years after this event, and nothing is recorded of him. His life generally was much quieter and far less full of incident than those of his father and

Gen.
xxvii. 41—
xxviii. 9.

III. Isaac's
Blessing
(vers. 1-5).

Gen.

xxvii. 41—

xxviii. 9.

of his son, and yet it would almost seem as though the utter silence concerning these fifty years was intended to remind us of the comparative failure of Isaac after his deliberate attempt to divert the blessing from his son Jacob. At any rate, God often has to set aside even honoured workers by reason of unfaithfulness, and it is possible that Isaac's sin led to these years of quiet without any incident worthy of being recorded by Divine inspiration. At the same time this may not be the true interpretation of the silence, which may be due simply to the absence of anything in his life worthy of special note. Quiet lives can glorify God just as much as public ones. It is perfectly true that 'full many a flower is born to blush unseen,' but *not* to 'waste its sweetness on the desert air.' God can use the lives unseen of men to bring about blessing and glorify Himself.

IV. Jacob's
Obedience
(ver. 5).

IV. *Jacob's Obedience* (ver. 5). In all this section Jacob appears quite passive. First he listens obediently to his mother's voice about fleeing to Haran, and then with equal readiness he accepts his father's command and sets out on his long journey. Verse 5, according to the well-known Hebrew literary characteristic, anticipates the detailed record by stating quite briefly his journey and destination. Jacob little knew at the time what this all meant. Apparently it was but a small incident, a stay of a short time while his brother's anger cooled; but God had wider purposes to fulfil, and that which seemed an ordinary journey and a short stay was to be made part of a great

An Interlude

project involving many other lives than his own. Gen. xxvii. 41—
When he said 'Good-bye' to his mother and father, in the full expectation of a speedy return, he was entering upon some of the profoundest experiences of his life. He went away ostensibly to avoid his brother's anger and to seek for himself a wife. He found very much more than this, for, as we shall see, he came in contact with God, and learned lessons that lasted him all his days. Events that seem trivial to us are often fraught with momentous results. xxviii. 9.

V. *Esau's Marriage* (vers. 6-9).—The narrative once more turns by contrast to Esau, who now makes another attempt to regain the blessing. He is quick enough to see at length that his father and mother disapprove of his own marriage, and had sent Jacob to seek a wife from Laban, and now Esau attempts to steal a march on Jacob and reverse the blessing. He tries to please his parents, for obviously he has no thought of doing what he proposes from any higher motive. He adds to his two Canaanitish wives a daughter of Ishmael, his own cousin. It makes no difference to him that Ishmael is not of the same direct line as himself, nor does it matter to him in the least that God had passed over Ishmael for his father. Esau has no idea of spiritual realities. All that he is concerned about is to please his parents, and if possible to win back the blessing. This again shows the real character of the man and the utter absence of any spiritual reality actuating his life. Esau is one of those who, as it has been truly and acutely said, tries to

V. Esau's
Marriage
(vers. 6-9).

Genesis xxv. 11—xxxvi. 8

Gen. do what God's people do in the vain hope that
xxvii. 41—somehow or other it will be pleasing to God (Dods,
xxviii. 9. *Genesis, in loc.*). He will not do precisely what
God requires, but something like it. He will not
entirely give up the world and put God first in his
life, but he will try to meet some of God's wishes
by a little alteration in his conduct. Instead of
renouncing sin he will cover it with the glory of
small virtues ; but it is one thing to conform to the
outward practices of God's people, it is quite
another to be thoroughly and truly godly at heart.
Men of the Esau type may attend the House of
God and join in its service, but at heart they are
essentially without God and regardless of His claims
on their lives.

Suggestions
for Medita-
tion.

1. *God has a plan for every life.*—One of Bush-
nell's great sermons has the title 'Every Man's life a
Plan of God.' God had a plan for Jacob's life, and
that plan could not be hindered by the action of Isaac
or Esau, nor could it be really furthered by the clever-
ness and craft of Rebekah. It gives dignity, force,
and peace to life to realise that God has a plan for
it, and it is at once our duty and privilege to seek out
that plan and to discover God's will concerning us.

God's plan
for our life.

2. *God has His own ways of realising His plan
for us.*—Rebekah's thought in sending out Jacob
was very different from God's idea. There were
surprises in store that Jacob never dreamt of.
God's ways are higher than ours, and it is our
truest wisdom to let God show us His way and
enable us to fulfil His purpose concerning us.

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3. *God is willing to reveal His plan for us.*— Gen.

Two requirements are necessary if we are to know God's plan for our lives. There must be the sympathy of trust and the faithfulness of obedience. Sympathetic trust is always the parent of spiritual insight. God ever reveals Himself to the trustful, loving heart. Faithful obedience is another and connected secret of spiritual insight. 'If any man wills to do . . . he shall know' (John vii. 17). 'Then shall we know, if we follow on' (Hos. vi. 3). Trustful obedience, step by step, is the sure guarantee of spiritual knowledge. 'The secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him, and He will show them His covenant.'

xxvii. 41—
xxviii. 9.

VI

BETHEL

GEN. xxviii. 10-22.

10. And Jacob went out from Beer-sheba and went toward Haran.

11. And he lighted upon a certain place, and tarried there all night, because the sun was set ; and he took of the stones of that place, and put *them for* his pillows, and lay down in that place to sleep.

12. And he dreamed, and behold a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven : and behold the angels of God ascending and descending on it.

13. And, behold, the Lord stood above it, and said, I *am* the Lord God of Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac : the land whereon thou liest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed ;

14. And thy seed shall be as the dust of the earth, and thou shalt spread abroad to the west, and to the east, and to the north, and to the south : and in thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed.

15. And, behold, I *am* with thee, and will keep thee in all *places* whither thou goest, and will bring thee again into this land ; for I will not leave thee, until I have done *that* which I have spoken to thee of.

16. And Jacob awaked out of his sleep, and he said, Surely the Lord is in this place ; and I knew *it* not.

17. And he was afraid, and said, How dreadful *is* this place ! this *is* none other but the house of God, and this *is* the gate of heaven.

18. And Jacob rose up early in the morning, and took the stone that he had put *for* his pillows, and set it up *for* a pillar, and poured oil upon the top of it.

19. And he called the name of that place Beth-el : but the name of that city *was called* Luz at the first.

20. And Jacob vowed a vow, saying, If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat, and raiment to put on,

Bethel

21. So that I come again to my father's house in peace ; then shall the Lord be my God :

22. And this stone, which I have set *for* a pillar, shall be God's house : and of all that Thou shalt give me I will surely give the tenth unto Thee.

THE story of God's special and personal dealings with Jacob commences with this incident. Hitherto he has not appeared in a very favourable light, and it is only indirectly that we have been able to gather anything of his relation to God. Now, however, we are to have a series of revelations of his character as he is being tested and trained by the wisdom and grace of God. The story is one of chastisement and mercy. Jacob again and again reaps the fruit of his sins, and yet we shall see the triumphs of Divine grace in one of the most naturally unattractive and even forbidding of temperaments.

I. *The Journey* (vers. 10, 11).—His departure from home in search of a wife was very different from that of his father's servant on the memorable occasion when Abraham sent him to bring back Rebekah. Jacob is alone, no steward to accompany him, no cavalcade, no companions ; he is really fleeing for his life. It is not wholly imaginative to try to realise something of his thoughts and feelings on this memorable occasion, fresh from the loving farewell with his mother. It is almost certain that he commenced to review the past as well as contemplate the future. Should he ever return to his father's house in peace ? Should he ever possess the blessing that had been bestowed upon him ? Was it after all so very precious and valuable ?

Gen. xxviii. 10-22.

I. The Journey (vers. 10, 11).

Genesis xxv. 11—xxxvi. 3

Gen.
xxviii. 10-
22.

In what respect was he better than his brother Esau? Would it not have been better if he had never sought the birthright and obtained the blessing? Such thoughts as these probably coursed through his mind as he realised that he was virtually being banished from all that was near and dear to him.

He is like many another since his day who has gone out from the old home to seek his fortune elsewhere, although in his case the departure was not the natural and inevitable development of young life, but was due to his sin. There is always something of a crisis when the old home is left and a new life is entered upon. Most young people have to face this fact and to experience all the emotions that are associated with it.

II. The
Dream
(ver. 12)

II. *The Dream* (ver. 12).—From Beersheba, 12 miles to the south of Hebron, Jacob journeys, and at length reaches the place afterwards known as Bethel, which was situated in the mountains of Ephraim, about three hours' journey north of Jerusalem. The place was a bleak moorland in the heart of Palestine. 'The track winds through an uneven valley, covered, as with gravestones, by large sheets of bare rock; some few here and there standing up like the cromlechs of Druidical monuments.'¹ Here he lies down to rest, and, influenced no doubt by the surroundings, in his sleep the stones seem to be like stairs reaching from earth to heaven. To the lonely man there seemed 'a ladder set up on the

¹ Stanley's *Sinai and Palestine*.

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earth, and the top of it reached to heaven,' and on the ladder angels of God were ascending and descending. As on so many other occasions, God spoke by means of this dream. The ladder was intended first of all to remind Jacob of the gulf between his soul and God. By craft he had obtained his brother's birthright, by lying and deceit he had snatched away the blessing, and now the fugitive is reminded of the separation between his soul and God and the absolute necessity of some means of communication. The ladder also reminded him of the way in which his soul could come back to God in spite of his sin, and the fact that it reached from earth to heaven signified the complete provision of Divine grace for human life. Right down to his deepest need the ladder came, right up to the presence of God the ladder reached, and the vision of the angels on the ladder was intended to symbolise the freedom of communication, telling of access to God, and of constant, free, easy communication between earth and heaven.

III. *The Revelation* (vers. 13-15).—The ladder was only the symbolical part of his dream; he also received that which was far more and deeper than anything symbolical. Above the ladder stood the God of his father, and from that Divine presence came his first direct message from above. There was first of all the revelation of God as 'Jehovah, the God of Abraham and of Isaac.' Then came the specific revelation concerning the land whereon Jacob was lying, and the promise of that land to him and to his seed. It will be remembered that

Gen. xxviii. 10-22.

III. The Revelation (vers. 13-15).

Genesis xxv. 11—xxxvi. 8

Gen. xxviii. 10-22. the blessings bestowed upon Jacob by Isaac his father (xxvii. 27-29 and xxviii. 3, 4) were couched in very general terms, but now Jacob received the specific, clear assurance that the covenant with Abraham and Isaac was to be continued with him, and through him to his seed.

Then followed a four-fold assurance which must have been very precious to the soul of the fugitive—(a) The Divine Presence: 'I am with thee'; (b) the Divine protection: 'and will keep thee'; (c) the Divine preservation: 'and will bring thee again into this land'; (d) the Divine promise: 'I will not leave thee until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of.' Observe in this passage the threefold repetition of 'Behold': 'Behold the angels' (ver. 12), 'Behold the Lord' (ver. 13), 'Behold, I am with thee' (ver. 15). Thus Jacob was encouraged and assured by a Divine revelation.

IV. The Response
(vers. 16, 17).

IV. *The Response* (vers. 16, 17).—The vision aroused Jacob out of his sleep, and he was astonished at finding God where he fancied himself alone. Hitherto he does not seem to have had personal knowledge of God, everything having been mediated to him through his father and mother. Now he understands and realises God as his personal God, and is surprised to find that heaven is so near, though he is far from home. Henceforward life takes a different colour and 'earth's crammed with heaven' for him. No wonder he is afraid, for he realises that this is the place where God dwells, the house of God, the gate of heaven. When the soul comes in contact with God for the first

Bethel

time it is a good sign that the result is awe, reverence, fear. 'Holy and reverend is His Name.'

V. *The Memorial* (vers. 18, 19).—Jacob seems to have gone to sleep again and rested until the morning, and then on rising he took the stone which he had put for his pillow and consecrated it to God in commemoration of that wonderful night. This was a fine and worthy idea ; to him the place would be evermore sacred as the spot at which he first met God. He did not wish to lose any part of the impression of so memorable an occasion. The place of our conversion is one to be remembered and recalled.

'He felt that, vivid as the impression on his mind then was, it would tend to fade, and he erected this stone that in after days he might have a witness that would testify to his present assurance. One great secret in the growth of character is the art of prolonging the quickening power of right ideas, of perpetuating just and inspiring impressions. And he who despises the aid of all external helps for the accomplishment of this object is not likely to succeed' (Dods' *Genesis*, p. 288).

It is evident that Jacob was deeply impressed with the vision, the ladder, and the voice of God, and his responsiveness to the Divine revelation is worthy of careful notice in view of his former craft and deceit. It shows that, in spite of everything, he had that in his soul which reached out towards the Divine will, however unworthy and wrong were the methods that he used. We cannot imagine the purely secular, sensuous, and even sensual Esau

Gen.
xxviii.
10-22.

V. The
Memorial
(vers. 18, 19).

Genesis xxv. 11—xxxvi. 8

Gen.
xxviii.

10-22.

VI. The Vow
(vers. 20-22).

entering into the spirit of this vision or allowing it to have any influence upon his life.

VI. *The Vow* (vers. 20-22).—With the memorial stone comes the story of the first vow recorded in Scripture. Jacob acknowledges his need of God, which is another testimony to the genuineness of the man, and he vows, saying, 'If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat, and raiment to put on, so that I come again to my father's house in peace; then shall the Lord be my God: and this stone, which I have set for a pillar, shall be God's house: and of all that Thou shalt give me I will surely give the tenth unto Thee.' The precise attitude of Jacob in this vow has been variously interpreted. Some have thought that his 'If' really means '*Since* God will be with me,' and following the margin of the Revised Version it is suggested that the protasis should not be in verse 21 but in verse 22, and that we should read: 'Since God will be with me and will keep me . . . and will give me . . . *and* the Lord will be my Guide *then* this stone . . . shall be God's house.' Others think that Jacob cannot be excused a low and mercenary feeling in this vow. We must be careful not to read too much into it, but it is equally necessary not to read too little into it. Let us remember that this is what we should call Jacob's conversion, the commencement of a life of grace, and we are therefore not to be surprised if he is unfamiliar with God and cannot at once rise to a high level of spiritual attainment. Even

Bethel

supposing it is true that he met God's 'I am with thee' with '*If* God will be with me,' he is only doing what Peter did under very different circumstances. When the Lord said, 'It is I,' Peter replied, '*If* it be thou.' It is a great thing that Jacob realises his need of God and that he makes this resolution, under whatever condition, acknowledging God as his God and pledging himself to God's service. If only some of those who are inclined to criticise Jacob would do what he promised and give the tenth of their income to God, what a different state of affairs would obtain in connection with God's work at home and abroad!

Gen.
xxviii.
10-22.

The story of Bethel left its mark on the people of Israel, for it is found referred to, at least twice in after ages (Hos. xii. 4; John i. 51). It is full of lessons for the life of the believer, and we shall do well to ponder it closely as a revelation of Divine grace.

Suggestions
for Medita-
tion.

1. *God's condescending grace.*—The vision of Bethel was used by our Lord as a symbol and type of Himself: 'Ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.' As the ladder was to Jacob so is the Lord Jesus Christ to mankind, a revelation of God's wonderful condescension and mercy. Set up on earth in Bethlehem, the top of it reached to heaven at the Ascension, and now the Lord Jesus is our Divine ladder, first of revelation and then of communication. All that we know of God comes through Him, and all that we receive from God

Condescend-
ing Grace.

Genesis xxv. 11—xxxvi. 8

Gen.
xxviii.
10-22.

comes through Him. Ever since the Incarnation of our Lord earth has been no desert, but a place where God is manifest to the eye and heart of faith.

All-sufficient
Grace.

2. *God's all-sufficient grace.*—How appropriate this story is for those who are standing on the threshold of life, who have just left home and are feeling all the loneliness associated with this time! It is on such an occasion that God meets us and offers us Himself, shows us the ladder between earth and heaven, assures us that His grace is all-sufficient, and that though we are far from home we are very near to Him: 'My grace is sufficient for thee.'

Overruling
Grace.

3. *God's overruling grace.*—There was really no need for Jacob to have fled from his brother, for God could have dealt with Esau and put everything right; but Jacob has to suffer the results of his impatience and imprudence, and God will overrule his mistakes and sins and teach him still deeper lessons. Though he had left his father's house, God was still with him, and in this vision he was taught that God was now taking him in hand and would not leave him till the work of grace was done. How wonderfully God overrules our mistakes, and faults, and sins, and gathers up the threads of our troubles and even weaves them into His pattern for our life!

Sovereign
Grace.

4. *God's sovereign grace.*—It was necessary that Jacob should learn how utterly helpless he was to bring about the Divine purposes concerning him. It was only when he was asleep, needy and helpless, that God revealed Himself. Jacob had hitherto

Bethel

considered it necessary to use craft and cleverness in order, as he thought, to bring about the purposes of God. He was now to be told that God could dispense with him and yet accomplish His own Divine aims. It is a very salutary lesson to learn the sovereignty of grace, to realise that we have no claim on God, to be conscious that God does not require our cleverness or ability, and to lean our hearts increasingly upon the Divine word: 'Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit.'

Gen.
xxviii.
10-22.

5. *God's teaching grace.*—At Bethel God really commenced the education and making of Jacob. To educate is to 'educer' or draw out that which is within, and while we might have thought that there was no material worthy of God's consideration, the Divine Teacher could see the possibilities of this man, and was willing, in marvellous patience, to attempt the work of training. God did this in three ways: (a) He revealed Jacob's character to himself; He brought him to the end of himself and revealed to him something of his evil heart. (b) He also showed to Jacob his utter helplessness from earthly sources. Bereft of father and home, in danger from his brother, and powerless himself, Jacob was perforce compelled to turn to God. (c) Above all, the Lord revealed Himself to Jacob. He introduced him to a larger life and wider experience, reminding him that the Divine presence was to be found everywhere. So 'He led him about, He instructed him, He kept him as the apple of His eye.'

Educating
Grace.

6. *God's long-suffering grace.*—When Jacob

Genesis xxv. 11—xxxvi. 8

Gen.
xxviii.
10-22.

Long-suffer-
ing Grace.

awoke after the vision his true life commenced. We are not altogether surprised at the low level of his spiritual life, for he was evidently unfamiliar with God and needed very much more experience before he could enter fully into all the Divine purposes concerning him. Even if we acquit him of bargaining we can still see that his knowledge of God was only superficial, and he was not yet able to enter into the fulness and glory of the Divine thought concerning him and his seed. But God had commenced His work in Jacob's soul and with marvellous patience God continued His dealings with him. Since at our conversion we know very little of God, we and others must not be surprised if our lack of familiarity with Divine realities leads us into error; but the great thing is to commence the true life, for as we yield ourselves to God and wait upon Him we shall find ourselves taught, upheld, and blessed by the wonderful patience of His grace. Only let us be clear that when God says, 'I am with thee' we do not reply with 'If,' but say, out of a full heart, 'I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me,' and, like Abraham of old, go forward 'fully persuaded that what He has promised He is able also to perform.'

VII

THE NEW LIFE

GEN. xxix. 1-30

1. Then Jacob went on his journey, and came into the land of the people of the east.

2. And he looked, and behold a well in the field, and, lo, there *were* three flocks of sheep lying by it; for out of that well they watered the flocks: and a great stone *was* upon the well's mouth.

3. And thither were all the flocks gathered: and they rolled the stone from the well's mouth, and watered the sheep, and put the stone again upon the well's mouth in his place.

4. And Jacob said unto them, My brethren, whence *be* ye? And they said, of Haran *are* we.

5. And he said unto them, Know ye Laban the son of Nahor? And they said, We know *him*.

6. And he said unto them, *Is* he well? And they said *He is* well: and, behold, Rachel his daughter cometh with the sheep.

7. And he said, Lo, *it is* yet high day, neither *is it* time that the cattle should be gathered together; water ye the sheep, and go *and* feed *them*.

8. And they said, We cannot, until all the flocks be gathered together, and *till* they roll the stone from the well's mouth; then we water the sheep.

9. And while he yet spake with them, Rachel came with her father's sheep: for she kept them.

10. And it came to pass when Jacob saw Rachel the daughter of Laban his mother's brother, and the sheep of Laban his mother's brother, that Jacob went near, and rolled the stone from the well's mouth, and watered the flock of Laban his mother's brother.

11. And Jacob kissed Rachel, and lifted up his voice, and wept.

12. And Jacob told Rachel that he was her father's brother, and that he *was* Rebekah's son: and she ran and told her father.

Genesis xxv. 11—xxxvi. 8

13. And it came to pass, when Laban heard the tidings of Jacob his sister's son, that he ran to meet him, and embraced him, and kissed him, and brought him to his house. And he told Laban all these things.

14. And Laban said to him, Surely thou *art* my bone and my flesh. And he abode with him the space of a month.

15. And Laban said unto Jacob, Because thou *art* my brother shouldst thou therefore serve me for nought? tell me, what *shall* thy wages *be*?

16. And Laban had two daughters; the name of the elder *was* Leah, and the name of the younger *was* Rachel.

17. Leah *was* tender eyed; but Rachel *was* beautiful and well favoured.

18. And Jacob loved Rachel; And said I will serve thee seven years for Rachel thy younger daughter.

19. And Laban said, *It is* better that I give her to thee, than that I should give her to another man: abide with me.

20. And Jacob served seven years for Rachel; And they seemed unto him *but* a few days, for the love he had to her.

21. And Jacob said unto Laban. Give me my wife, for my days are fulfilled, that I may go in unto her.

22. And Laban gathered together all the men of the place, and made a feast.

23. And it came to pass in the evening, that he took Leah his daughter, and brought her to him: and he went in unto her.

24. And Laban gave unto his daughter Leah Zilpah his maid *for* an handmaid.

25. And it came to pass, that in the morning, behold it *was* Leah: and he said to Laban, What is this thou hast done unto me? did not I serve with thee for Rachel? wherefore then hast thou beguiled me?

26. And Laban said, It must not be so done in our country, to give the younger before the firstborn.

27. Fulfil her week, and we will give thee this also for the service which thou shall serve with me yet seven other years.

28. And Jacob did so, and fulfilled her week; and he gave him Rachel his daughter to wife also.

29. And Laban gave to Rachel his daughter Bilhah his handmaid to be her maid.

30. And he went in also unto Rachel, and he loved also Rachel more than Leah, and served with him seven other years.

Gen. xxix.
1-30.

JACOB is now in the greatest of all schools, that of experience, and there are many lessons to learn. These three chapters (xxix-xxxi.) cover forty

The New Life

years of his life, and are the record of a large part of his training. **Gen. xxix. 1-30.**

I. *The New Start* (ver. 1).—The Hebrew is very suggestive: 'Then Jacob lifted up his feet.' A new hope had dawned in his breast, and now he starts on his way from Bethel with alacrity. The revelation of God and the assurance of God's presence and blessing had brought light and cheer to his heart, and, like every young convert fresh from the experience of meeting God for the first time, 'he went on his way rejoicing.' Who does not remember those early days, when everything seemed different, when joy illuminated the pathway, and hope sprang up, covering the pathway with its rainbow of blessed assurance! The long journey (450 miles from Beersheba) was at length accomplished, and he arrived in the country of his kinsfolk, 'the people of the East.'

II. *The Memorable Meeting* (vers. 2-14).—As he neared his journey's end he came across a well with flocks of sheep lying by it, and on asking the shepherds whence they were, received the answer, 'From Haran.' Another question followed about Laban, and he was soon told that his uncle was in health, and that Rachel his daughter was coming with the sheep. Then comes a point exceedingly characteristic of Jacob. He suggests to the shepherds that, as it is not yet time to gather together the cattle and fold them for the night, they should at least go and give the flocks of sheep food and water. What was the meaning of this suggestion of Jacob? There does not seem much doubt that it was made

I. The New Start (ver. 1).

II. The Memorable Meeting (vers. 2-14).

Genesis xxv. 11—xxxvi. 8

Gen. xxix. 1-30. for the purpose of getting an opportunity to be alone with Rachel. Already he seems to realise that his way has been guided aright, and with characteristic forethought and promptitude he desires to make the most of the opportunity. The shepherds decline to accede to his request, urging that it would cause unnecessary trouble to give water to some of the sheep while the others had not yet gathered round the well.

Then comes the meeting with Rachel, and we are doubtless right in regarding Jacob's feelings as those of 'love at first sight.' With courtesy he went near and rolled away the stone from the mouth of the well, and then revealed himself to his cousin, telling her who he was and whence he had come. Rachel thereupon goes and tells the news to her father. The picture is one of idyllic beauty. Faith had come into his life through his meeting with God at Bethel, and now had entered that second best of God's gifts, a woman's love.

Laban at once comes out to meet him, and gives him the heartiest possible welcome. In spite of all that we have to see and note about Laban, it is evident that he was a man of warm-hearted and generous impulses, and was genuinely delighted to welcome his kinsman into his house.

III. The Faithful Service (vers. 15-20).

III. *The Faithful Service* (vers. 15-20).—Laban again stands out well in the story at this point. He does not wish to presume upon his relationship to Jacob by expecting him to do service for nothing, so he asks him to say what wages he desires. Jacob thereupon proposes to serve seven years for

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Rachel, Laban's younger daughter; and to this **Gen. xxix.**
Laban agrees, saying that he would much prefer **1-30.**
giving Rachel to him than to a stranger.

'And Jacob served seven years for Rachel; and they seemed unto him but a few days, for the love he had to her.' There are few verses more familiar in the story of Jacob than this beautiful description of his love; and whatever else may be said about him, his sharp practices, cleverness, and craft, it is impossible not to give adhesion to Coleridge's well-known words that 'No man could be a bad man who loved as Jacob loved Rachel.' For seven long years he toiled hard and faithfully in the service of Laban, and yet because of his great love the time passed rapidly and seemed but a few days. Love such as this takes little account of time; buoyed up and urged on by its joyous hope, it lives and labours and grows stronger and stronger.

V. *The Bitter Disappointment* (vers. 21-30).—The seven years are now over, and Jacob asks Laban for the fulfilment of his promise. Laban thereupon prepares for the usual wedding-feast, which, in the East, lasts seven days, and then, under cover of the darkness, and according to Eastern custom, he brings his daughter closely veiled to the tent of Jacob. Jacob is soon made aware of the treachery of Laban, to which Leah was a party, though probably with no real power to resist her father's will. Nor indeed was she likely in any case to resist it, since it is evident that a deep love for Jacob had sprung up in her heart. Laban's answer to Jacob's reproach is another indication of the

V. The
Bitter Dis-
appointment
(vers. 21-30).

Genesis xxv. 11—xxxvi. 8

Gen. xxix. 1-30. true character of the man. He told Jacob that it was not customary in their country that the younger daughter should be married before the first-born; and yet surely Jacob ought to have been told this at the beginning, not at the end of the seven years. To add to the difficulty and confusion Laban proposes that at the end of the week of the marriage-feast for Leah Jacob should take Rachel also as his wife. Jacob agrees to this; and so, at the close of the marriage festivities in connection with his marriage with Leah, Jacob accomplishes his heart's desire and marries Rachel. It is clear, from a careful consideration of the story, that he married Rachel at the beginning, not at the end of his second seven years of service. His love for Rachel had never varied, and he was quite prepared to serve with Laban 'yet another seven years.'

**Suggestions
for Medita-
tion.**

Jacob is already in the training school of discipline. God is dealing with him in deed and in truth, and as we study the story we find several messages that ought to come home to our own hearts.

**Doing God's
Will.**

1. *Doing the will of God.*—After Bethel came the long journey to Haran, and Bethel was intended to fit Jacob for the journey and all that lay before him. Quiet times with God are intended to be the means of doing our ordinary work in 'the daily round, the common task.' Conversion is intended to be expressed in consecration. Mountain-top experiences are to be followed by service in the

The New Life

valley, and the real test of our life lies not in our profession, but in our character and conduct. One of the most practical, pointed, and pressing questions that we should ask ourselves day by day is this: What are our Bethels doing for us? 'If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them.' All our professions of fellowship with God will count for nothing unless those experiences are reproduced in our ordinary every-day life. 'How call ye Me Lord, and do not the things which I say?'

2. *Experiencing the providence of God.*—The story before us is a very ordinary one. A journey, a meeting with shepherds near a well, a young woman coming up, an act of courtesy; and yet these small events led to great and far-reaching results. How very much depends upon very little! There is nothing really small in human life. We start out in the morning, and what we may call a chance meeting, or the receipt of an ordinary letter, or some very slight circumstance may affect the whole of the subsequent life of quite a number of people. We call this the 'providence' of God, and we do well; and the true Christian heart will always love to trace the hand of God in the ordinary every-day experiences of life. For, after all, 'ordinary' means 'ordered,' and it is the joy of the believer to realise that everything is ordered and that 'all things work together for good to them that love God.' The harmonious and beneficent combination of circumstances guided and overruled by the wisdom and will of God constitutes for the

Gen. xxix.
1-30.
God's
Providence
experienced.

Genesis xxv. 11—xxxvi. 8

Gen. xxix. Christian soul the joy and cheer of every-day living.
1-30.

The Justice
of God.

3. *Discovering the justice of God.*—Laban's deception came to Jacob as a great surprise, and yet he ought not to have been astonished in view of his past. He was now commencing to reap as he had sown. He was now being treated as he had treated his father and brother, and the deceiver is at length deceived. He had come to the school whence all his own powers of deceit had originally come. Laban is seen to be the equal of his clever sister Rebekah, and Jacob is being paid back with the family coin. God has no favourites, and if His own children wander from the pathway they have to suffer. And yet the sufferings are not punitive, but disciplinary. We are chastened and trained, and it is the highest wisdom of every believer to accept and to learn all that God has to teach him. Old tendencies need to be corrected, old weaknesses made strong, old faults removed; and if only we yield ourselves into the hands of the great Potter He will fashion the clay, in spite of all our natural disadvantages, into vessels unto honour.

'Yet take Thy way—for, sure, Thy way is best;
Stretch or contract me, Thy poor debtor;
'Tis but the tuning of my breast
To make the music better.'

VIII

IN THE SHADOWS

GEN. xxix. 31—xxx. 43

31. And when the Lord saw that Leah *was* hated, he opened her womb : but Rachel *was* barren.

32. And Leah conceived, and bare a son, and she called his name Reuben : for she said, Surely the Lord hath looked upon my affliction ; now therefore my husband will love me.

33. And she conceived again, and bare a son : and said, Because the Lord hath heard that I *was* hated, he hath therefore given me this *son* also : and she called his name Simeon.

34. And she conceived again, and bare a son ; and said, Now this time will my husband be joined unto me, because I have born him three sons : therefore was his name called Levi.

35. And she conceived again, and bare a son : and she said, Now will I praise the Lord : therefore she called his name Judah ; and left bearing.

1. And when Rachel saw that she bare Jacob no children, Rachel envied her sister ; and said unto Jacob, Give me children, or else I die.

2. And Jacob's anger was kindled against Rachel : and he said, *Am* I in God's stead, who hath withheld from thee the fruit of the womb ?

3. And she said, Behold my maid Bilhah, go in unto her ; and she shall bare upon my knees, that I may also have children by her.

4. And she gave him Bilhah her handmaid to wife : and Jacob went in unto her.

5. And Bilhah conceived, and bare Jacob a son.

6. And Rachel said, God hath judged me, and hath also heard my voice, and hath given me a son : therefore called she his name Dan.

7. And Bilhah Rachel's maid conceived again, and bare Jacob a second son.

8. And Rachel said, With great wrestlings have I wrestled

Genesis xxv. 11—xxxvi. 8

with my sister, and I have prevailed : and she called his name Naphtali.

9. When Leah saw that she had left bearing, she took Zilpah her maid, and gave her Jacob to wife.

10. And Zilpah Leah's maid bare Jacob a son.

11. And Leah said, A troop cometh : and she called his name Gad.

12. And Zilpah Leah's maid bare Jacob a second son.

13. And Leah said, Happy am I, for the daughters will call me blessed : and she called his name Asher.

14. And Reuben went in the days of wheat harvest, and found mandrakes in the field, and brought them unto his mother Leah. Then Rachel said to Leah, Give me, I pray thee, of thy son's mandrakes.

15. And she said unto her, *Is it* a small matter that thou hast taken my husband ? and wouldst thou take away my son's mandrakes also ? And Rachel said, Therefore he shall lie with thee to night for thy son's mandrakes.

16. And Jacob came out of the field in the evening, and Leah went out to meet him, and said, Thou must come in unto me ; for surely I have hired thee with my son's mandrakes. And he lay with her that night.

17. And God hearkened unto Leah, and she conceived, and bare Jacob the fifth son.

18. And Leah said, God hath given me my hire, because I have given my maiden to my husband : and she called his name Issachar.

19. And Leah conceived again, and bare Jacob the sixth son.

20. And Leah said, God hath endued me *with* a good dowry ; now will my husband dwell with me, because I have born him six sons : and she called his name Zebulun.

21. And afterwards she bare a daughter, and called her name Dinah.

22. And God remembered Rachel, and God hearkened to her, and opened her womb.

23. And she conceived, and bare a son ; and said, God hath taken away my reproach :

24. And she called his name Joseph ; and said, The Lord shall add to me another son.

25. And it came to pass, when Rachel had born Joseph, that Jacob said unto Laban, Send me away, that I may go unto mine own place and to my country.

26. Give *me* my wives and my children, for whom I have served thee, and let me go : for thou knowest my service which I have done thee.

27. And Laban said unto him, I pray thee, if I have found favour in thine eyes, *tarry* : for I have learned by experience that the Lord hath blessed me for thy sake.

In the Shadows

28. And he said, Appoint me thy wages, and I will give *it*.

29. And he said unto him, Thou knowest how I have served thee, and how thy cattle was with me.

30. For *it was* little which thou hadst before I *came*, and it is *now* increased unto a multitude; and the Lord hath blessed thee since my coming: and now when shall I provide for *mine* own house also?

31. And he said, What shall I give thee? And Jacob said, Thou shalt not give me any thing: if thou wilt do this thing for me, I will again feed *and* keep thy flock:

32. I will pass through all thy flock to-day, removing from thence all the speckled and spotted cattle, and all the brown cattle among the sheep, and the spotted and speckled among the goats: and *of such* shall be my hire.

33. So shall my righteousness answer for me in time to come, when it shall come for my hire before thy face: every one that is not speckled and spotted among the goats, and brown among the sheep, that shall be counted stolen with me.

34. And Laban said, Behold I would it might be according to thy word.

35. And he removed that day the he goats that were ring-straked and spotted, and all the she goats that were speckled and spotted, *and* every one that had *some* white in it, and all the brown among the sheep, and gave *them* into the hand of his sons.

36. And he set three days' journey betwixt himself and Jacob: and Jacob fed the rest of Laban's flocks.

37. And Jacob took him rods of green poplar, and of the hazel and chesnut tree; and pilled white strakes in them, and made the white appear which *was* in the rods.

38. And he set the rods which he had pilled before the flocks in the gutters in the watering troughs when the flocks came to drink, that they should conceive when they came to drink.

39. And the flocks conceived before the rods, and brought forth cattle ringstraked, speckled, and spotted.

40. And Jacob did separate the lambs, and set the faces of the flocks toward the ringstraked, and all the brown in the flock of Laban; and he put his own flocks by themselves, and put them not unto Laban's cattle.

41. And it came to pass, whensoever the stronger cattle did conceive, that Jacob laid the rods before the eyes of the cattle in the gutters, that they might conceive among the rods.

42. But when the cattle were feeble, he put *them* not in: so the feebler were Laban's and the stronger Jacob's.

43. And the man increased exceedingly, and had much cattle, and maidservants, and menservants, and camels, and asses.

Genesis xxv. 11—xxxvi. 8

Gen. xxix.
31—xxx.
43.

JACOB'S life at Haran was one long prolonged discipline in various ways. He was almost continually in the crucible, whether through the faults and sins of others or through his own unworthy and sinful expedients. The entire story is full of sad and sordid incidents, but as we read it we shall do well to bear in mind that the long-suffering patience of God was all the while at work with his unworthy servant.

I. At Home
(chap. xxix.
31—xxx. 24.)

I. *At Home* (xxix. 31—xxx. 24).—The results of Laban's deception were soon evident in Jacob's home life. The possession of two wives brought its inevitable results. Polygamy was only tolerated, never accepted, by the Hebrews in after-days. The experience of their great progenitor doubtless weighed with them in the attitude they assumed towards it (Lev. xviii. 8). Yet even in this unhappy experience we can see the overruling hand of God, for when He saw Jacob's partiality for Rachel He taught him some needed lessons in connection with the birth of his first children. The way in which Leah's thoughts turned to God on the occasion of the birth of her first four sons is very striking. She realised that the Divine hand was being put forth on her behalf, and she trusted that through the birth of the sons her husband's feelings would be changed towards her.

The story then proceeds along familiar lines, in the envy and jealousy of the two sisters. First Rachel and then Leah manifests this spirit, with what results we know only too well. It is not too much to say that all this household friction had

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its dire influence upon the temperaments of the children, and we can hardly be surprised at what we read of them in after-days. There could not be righteousness, holiness, and peace amid such untoward surroundings. When there is trouble between parents, the children must necessarily suffer. It is impossible also to avoid noticing what seems to be a declension in Leah's spiritual life from the time of the birth of her fifth son (xxx. 17-21). In connection with the first four the Lord's hand was very definitely perceived, but now there is no longer any reference to the Covenant Name Jehovah, and the expressions indicate what is almost only purely personal and even selfish as two sons and a daughter are born to her.

At length God heard the prayers of Rachel and granted her her heart's desire in the birth of a son. It was now her turn to recognise the hand of the Lord and to acknowledge His mercy and goodness in dealing with her. As we review the whole story we are impressed more and more with the sadness of it all. It started with Laban's deception combined with Leah's co-operation; and although perhaps it would have been impossible for Jacob to have sustained any protest against this action, we can see the result of it in the years of sorrow and chastening that came to him and all the actors in this unhappy domestic tragedy. Where the home life is not full of love and peace, there can be no true witness for God or genuine helpfulness to one another.

Gen. xxix.
31—xxx.
43.

Rachel's
Prayers
heard.

Genesis xxv. 11—xxxvi. 8

Gen. xxix. 31—xxx. 43. II. *At Work* (xxx. 25-43).—The birth of Rachel's son seems to have been a turning-point in Jacob's life, and to have prompted a desire to return to his own country. He had now been with Laban the best part of twenty years (xxxi. 38, 41), and the longing for the old country and the old home pressed heavily upon him. Laban, however, was altogether unwilling to lose so valued a servant, for far too much blessing had come into his life through Jacob to allow him willingly to depart. He therefore suggested to Jacob that he should stay and fix his own terms; but Jacob was not ready to do this. He had had experience already of the way in which Laban had not kept his engagements about wages (xxxi. 7, 41), and he therefore preferred to take matters into his own hands. The real Jacob comes out in his distrust of others and his determination to manage things for himself. He therefore proposes to leave with Laban all the animals of one colour, and to keep for himself those that were spotted and speckled among the sheep and the goats. If we read Laban's words aright (ver. 34) it would seem as though he agreed to this proposal with reluctance; but his caution and greed are at once seen (vers. 34, 35), for he proceeds to remove the very animals that would be likely to fall to Jacob's lot, hands them over to the care of his sons and then puts the distance of three days' journey between them and Jacob. This again shows the character of the man with whom Jacob had to deal. Truly the deceiver is having a full payment in his own coin.

In the Shadows

It is now Jacob's turn to plot and plan, and his retaliation is sharp and complete (vers. 37-43). He is quite the equal of his uncle, and his plan succeeds beyond his imagination, for he increased exceedingly and had large flocks as well as a great retinue of servants. He was not likely to be far behind in any effort for his own advantage, and we can see in this method of revenge the depth of his resentment against Laban. It was a case of equal meeting equal, for there is nothing to choose between them in the character and extent of their cleverness and craft.

The entire story is full of searching lessons as we contemplate the extent to which human nature will go in furthering its own ends and accomplishing its own will. At the same time it is not without a background of teaching concerning the overruling mercy of God.

1. *A severe discipline.*—The fact that God permitted the deception about Leah to be practised on Jacob seems to suggest that it was necessary for him somehow or other to be emptied of self and self-seeking. Circumstances were therefore used to break him down and bring him to the end of himself. It is certainly very remarkable that, notwithstanding his intense love for Rachel, it was through Leah that the most permanent—that is, the Messianic—blessings were to come to and through him. It is a striking fact of experience that when he was about to enter upon the enjoyment of his seven years of toil God allowed something else,

Gen. xxix.
31—xxx.
43.

Suggestions
for Medita-
tion.

A severe
discipline.

Genesis xxv. 11—xxxvi. 8

Gen. xxix. instead of that which he desired, to come into his
31—xxx. life; something entirely unexpected; something
43. that seemed the very opposite of what he wished. When such disappointments come—if, as in this particular case, they are not the result of our own sin—it is well for us by the Spirit of God to be able to transmute our disappointment into ‘His appointment,’ for very often by such discipline our life becomes more fruitful. What we *want* may be good, but what we *need* may be better; and God deals with our needs, not with our wants.

A very
significant
avowal.

2. A *significant testimony*.—How very striking it is to read Laban’s words in appealing to Jacob not to depart! ‘I have learned by experience that the Lord hath blessed me for thy sake’ (xxx. 27). Laban had wit enough to see the value of having Jacob associated with him, and so he seeks to profit by the association, and use Jacob for his own ends. There does not seem to have been any real religion in Laban, but he was able to appreciate the value of it in Jacob. There are many Labans to-day who are not personally pious, but who are quite able to appreciate the good effects of piety in others. They do not become Church members and workers, but they attend church because of the social and other advantages that accrue to a profession of Christianity. It is a fine testimony to the value of religion when a man of the world is able to realise that there is something in it after all, and that, however indirectly, it ‘pays’ to be associated with God’s people. So far as the man’s personal life is concerned we may rightly speak of it as

In the Shadows

mean and contemptible, but we must not overlook the fact that it is a genuine testimony to the value of religion.

Gen. xxix.
31—xxx.
43.

3. *A sad downfall.*—When we read of Jacob's plot against Laban our hearts sink within us as we remember that this was done by a man who had been to Bethel, had seen angels, and heard the voice of God. We may not be surprised at Laban's deception; but for one who had met with God to descend to the level of the worldling, was indeed a deplorable revelation. Here are two men trying to outwit each other, and one of these two men is a professed believer in God. It is absolutely impossible to excuse and to exculpate Jacob. On no account was he warranted in following Laban's example. Just as it had been almost from the first, he was afraid to trust God with his affairs. He must take them into his own hands, and use all kinds of unworthy means to bring about ends that were in themselves perfectly right and justifiable. It was right and true that he should be paid his wages for those long years of service, but it was utterly wrong that he should be paid as the result of such unworthy means. The corruption of the best is the worst; and when a Christian falls, great and awful is the descent.

A Believer's
downfall.

4. *A striking manifestation.*—The human side of things is so prominent in this story that we almost fail to see and realise the Divine hand behind it all. How marvellous was God's patience with His unworthy servant! How much God must have seen in Jacob to have waited all these

Divine
Patience.

Genesis xxv. 11—xxxvi. 8

Gen. xxix. years, disciplining him, leading him, overruling his
31—xxx. mistakes and sins! Is there anything comparable
43. with the patience and mercy of God? As we read the narrative we find ourselves irritated and disappointed with Jacob's failures and falls after Bethel; and yet God was waiting His own time and way to bring about His purposes, to lead Jacob in the right path, to bring him to the end of himself and his self-seeking, and to manifest in that strong character the power and glory of His grace. Shall we not pray that we may have grace to exercise similar long-suffering patience with others, in spite of all disappointments and shattered hopes? If God be so long-suffering with us, surely we ought to be long-suffering one with another.

IX

TURNING HOMEWARDS

GEN. xxxi.

1. And he heard the words of Laban's sons, saying, Jacob hath taken away all that *was* our father's ; and of *that* which *was* our father's hath he gotten all his glory.

2. And Jacob beheld the countenance of Laban, and, behold, it *was* not toward him as before.

3. And the Lord said unto Jacob, Return unto the land of thy fathers, and to thy kindred ; and I will be with thee.

4. And Jacob sent and called Rachel and Leah to the field unto his flock,

5. And said unto them, I see your father's countenance, that it *is* not toward me as before ; but the God of my father hath been with me.

6. And ye know that with all my power I have served your father.

7. And your father hath deceived me, and changed my wages ten times ; but God suffered him not to hurt me.

8. If he said thus, The speckled shall be thy wages ; then all the cattle bare speckled : and if he said thus, The ringstraked shall be thy hire ; then bare all the cattle ringstraked.

9. Thus God hath taken away the cattle of your father, and given *them* to me.

10. And it came to pass at the time that the cattle conceived that I lifted up mine eyes, and saw in a dream, and, behold, the rams which leaped upon the cattle *were* ringstraked, speckled, and grisled.

11. And the angel of God spake unto me in a dream, *saying*, Jacob : And I said, Here *am* I.

12. And he said, Lift up now thine eyes, and see, all the rams which leap upon the cattle *are* ringstraked, speckled, and grisled : for I have seen all that Laban doeth unto thee.

13. I *am* the God of Beth-el, where thou anointedst the pillar, *and* where thou vowedst a vow unto me : now arise,

Genesis xxv. II—xxxvi. 8

get thee out from this land, and return unto the land of thy kindred.

14. And Rachel and Leah answered and said unto him, *Is there yet any portion or inheritance for us in our father's house?*

15. Are we not counted of him strangers? for he hath sold us, and hath quite devoured also our money.

16. For all the riches which God hath taken from our father, that *is* our's, and our children's: now then, whatsoever God hath said unto thee, do.

17. Then Jacob rose up, and set his sons and his wives upon camels;

18. And he carried away all his cattle, and all his goods which he had gotten, the cattle of his getting, which he had gotten in Padan-aram, for to go to Isaac his father in the land of Canaan.

19. And Laban went to shear his sheep: and Rachel had stolen the images that *were* her father's.

20. And Jacob stole away unawares to Laban the Syrian, in that he told him not that he fled.

21. So he fled with all that he had: and he rose up, and passed over the river, and set his face *toward* the mount Gilead.

22. And it was told Laban on the third day that Jacob was fled.

23. And he took his brethren with him, and pursued after him seven days' journey; and they overtook him in the mount Gilead.

24. And God came to Laban the Syrian in a dream by night, and said unto him, Take heed that thou speak not to Jacob either good or bad.

25. Then Laban overtook Jacob. Now Jacob had pitched his tent in the mount: and Laban with his brethren pitched in the mount of Gilead.

26. And Laban said to Jacob, What hast thou done, that thou hast stolen away unawares to me, and carried away my daughters, as captives *taken* with the sword?

27. Wherefore didst thou flee away secretly, and steal away from me; and didst not tell me, that I might have sent thee away with mirth, and with songs, with tabret, and with harp?

28. And hast not suffered me to kiss my sons and my daughters? thou hast now done foolishly in *so* doing.

29. It is in the power of my hand to do you hurt: but the God of your father spake unto me yesternight, saying, Take thou heed that thou speak not to Jacob either good or bad.

30. And now, *though* thou wouldest needs be gone, because thou sore longedst after thy father's house, *yet* wherefore hast thou stolen my gods?

Turning Homewards

31. And Jacob answered and said to Laban, Because I was afraid : for I said, Peradventure thou wouldest take by force thy daughters from me.

32. With whomsoever thou findest thy gods, let him not live : before our brethren discern thou what *is* thine with me, and take *it* to thee. For Jacob knew not that Rachel had stolen them.

33. And Laban went into Jacob's tent, and into Leah's tent, and into the two maidservants' tents ; but he found *them* not. Then went he out of Leah's tent, and entered into Rachel's tent.

34. Now Rachel had taken the images, and put them in the camel's furniture, and sat upon them. And Laban searched all the tent, but found *them* not.

35. And she said to her father, Let it not displease my lord that I cannot rise up before thee ; for the custom of women *is* upon me. And he searched, but found not the images.

36. And Jacob was wroth, and chode with Laban : and Jacob answered and said to Laban, What *is* my trespass ? what *is* my sin, that thou hast so hotly pursued after me ?

37. Whereas thou hast searched all my stuff, what hast thou found of all thy household stuff ? set *it* here before my brethren and thy brethren, that they may judge betwixt us both.

38. This twenty years *have I been* with thee ; thy ewes and thy she goats have not cast their young, and the rams of thy flock have I not eaten.

39. That which was torn *of beasts* I brought not unto thee ; I bare the loss of it ; of my hand didst thou require it, *whether* stolen by day, or stolen by night.

40. *Thus* I was ; in the day the drought consumed me, and the frost by night ; and my sleep departed from mine eyes.

41. Thus have I been twenty years in thy house ; I served thee fourteen years for thy two daughters, and six years for thy cattle : and thou hast changed my wages ten times.

42. Except the God of my father, the God of Abraham, and the fear of Isaac, had been with me, surely thou hadst sent me away now empty. God hath seen mine affliction and the labour of my hands, and rebuked *thee* yesternight.

43. And Laban answered and said unto Jacob, *These* daughters *are* my daughters, and *these* children *are* my children, and *these* cattle *are* my cattle, and all that thou seest *is* mine : and what can I do this day unto these my daughters, or unto their children which they have born ?

44. Now therefore come thou, let us make a covenant, I and thou ; and let it be for a witness between me and thee.

45. And Jacob took a stone, and set it up *for* a pillar.

46. And Jacob said unto his brethren, Gather stones ; and they took stones, and made an heap : and they did eat there upon the heap.

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47. And Laban called it Jegar-sahadutha : but Jacob called it Galeed.

48. And Laban said, This heap *is* a witness between me and thee this day. Therefore was the name of it called Galeed ;

49. And Mizpah ; for he said, The Lord watch between me and thee, when we are absent one from another.

50. If thou shalt afflict my daughters, or if thou shalt take *other* wives beside my daughters, no man *is* with us ; see, God *is* witness betwixt me and thee.

51. And Laban said to Jacob, Behold this heap, and behold *this* pillar, which I have cast betwixt me and thee ;

52. This heap *be* witness, and *this* pillar *be* witness, that I will not pass over this heap to thee, and that thou shalt not pass over this heap and this pillar unto me, for harm.

53. The God of Abraham, and the God of Nahor, the God of their father, judge betwixt us. And Jacob swore by the fear of his father Isaac.

54. Then Jacob offered sacrifice upon the mount, and called his brethren to eat bread : and they did eat bread, and tarried all night in the mount.

55. And early in the morning Laban rose up, and kissed his sons and his daughters, and blessed them : and Laban departed, and returned unto his place.

Gen. xxxi. **I**T was impossible that the relations just described between Laban and Jacob could last long. Everything was hurrying towards the climax of a necessary separation. Jacob's heart was also set on returning home (xxx. 25). As we study the various actors and movements we seem to see at first nothing but jealousy, craftiness, plotting, and hypocrisy. Yet, in spite of all these, we can hardly fail to notice how marvellously God overruled the confusions and made them subserve His purpose of grace for Jacob.

I. The Crisis
(vers. 1-3).

I. *The Crisis* (vers. 1-3).—Jacob's remarkable prosperity could not remain long unnoticed, and it was perhaps inevitable that Laban's sons should attribute it to craft and theft. And yet, in fairness to Jacob, we must observe that the charge was

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certainly exaggerated. They made no allowance **Gen. xxxi.** for their father's craftiness (xxx. 35) which was the occasion, if not the cause, of Jacob's counter-move. Laban was evidently actuated by similar feelings of envy (ver. 2). He hardly expected to find his match in his apparently yielding and submissive nephew.

In the midst of this trying situation God interposed, and made known His will to Jacob, so that what had hitherto been an intense desire became also a plain duty (ver. 3). He is commanded to return, and with the command comes the promise of the Divine presence.

II. *The Consultation* (vers. 4-16).—Jacob acts **II. The Consultation (vers. 4-16).** with his accustomed promptitude, and the first step is to take counsel with his wives. To have them in accord with him would be a very great advantage. The journey home would be long, and the destination unknown and strange to them. Much therefore depended on his obtaining their acquiescence. He thereupon placed before them all the facts (vers. 4-13), speaking plainly of their father's injustice to him. Deception, change of wages no less than ten times, and all this in spite of faithful, strenuous, long-continued service, had been Jacob's experience of Laban. But God had not left him, and now had come the Divine message to return to his own land. In this recital Jacob claims for himself Divine protection and approval (vers. 5, 9, 11), and reveals no consciousness of any wrong-doing of his own. To him it was a deep-seated conviction, which marked his life from

Genesis xxv. 11—xxxvi. 8

Gen. xxxi. the outset, that the end justified the means, and it seems clear that he considered he was doing right in taking steps to increase his possessions by reason of Laban's actions in not paying the proper wages. Jacob had a long way to go yet before he came to the end of himself.

The true character of Laban is clearly seen from the fact that his daughters entirely sided with Jacob against their own father. Even though it was husband against father, they were very evidently and heartily one with Jacob. They too had experienced their father's selfishness and greed, and were ready to approve of their husband's project and to go with him. While not laying undue stress on this acquiescence and approval, it is impossible not to regard it as a testimony to Jacob's general faithfulness, so far as the wives had the spiritual discernment to judge of it.

III. The
Flight (vers.
17-21).

III. *The Flight* (vers. 17-21).—Again Jacob acted with characteristic promptitude and initiative, that very striking feature which marked all his life. Collecting all that he had, he set out on his long journey. What his feelings were as he turned his face homewards we can well understand. Whether he had heard of his mother's death we know not; but if the news had not reached him, we can imagine the joyful anticipation of meeting her who had sacrificed much for him. There was, however, one crook in the lot, though happily Jacob was unaware of it. Rachel, his favourite and greatly beloved wife, still retained some of her Syrian superstitions, and had stolen the teraphim, or

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small household gods, belonging to her father. **Gen. xxxi.** These idols seem to have been used as charms, whose presence was thought to bring good to the possessor. It is curious that Rachel, and not Leah, should have almost always turned out to be Jacob's greatest hindrance in life.

IV. *The Pursuit* (vers. 22-24).—Jacob had only been gone three days when Laban was told of what had happened. At once he started off in pursuit, evidently intending to bring back the fugitives by superior force, and compel Jacob once more to return to a service that, in spite of everything, was decidedly profitable to Laban. But Laban has to reckon with Someone Who was stronger than Jacob. God interposes on Jacob's behalf and warns Laban to do the fugitives no harm. This Divine warning is a clear proof of what Laban had intended to do. It is also a testimony that, in spite of all we with our clear light can now see objectionable in Jacob, right and truth were on the whole with Jacob, and not with Laban. 'Laban's treatment of Jacob has naturally a bearing on the estimate we form of Jacob's behaviour towards Laban. Laban is not only the first to break faith with Jacob, but is throughout the chief offender: and had Laban treated Jacob honestly and generously, there is no reason to suppose that he would have sought to overreach him' (Driver, *Genesis*, p. 290.)

IV. The Pursuit (vers. 22-24).

V. *The Expostulation* (vers. 25-35).—Laban's attitude of injured innocence is very suggestive in the light of the whole story. It is a mixture

V. The Expostulation (vers. 25-35).

Genesis xxv. 11—xxxvi. 8

Gen. xxxi. of hypocrisy and exaggeration. His expressions of love for his daughters and grandchildren are either utterly unreal, or else so impulsively emotional as to be practically worthless. He had had many years of opportunity to show love to them, but the very reverse had been their experience, as they had told Jacob. Love expressed so late as this cannot be worth much. It is what we are prepared to do for our loved ones while they are with us, not the kind things we say of them after they are gone, that is the real test and genuine measure of our affection.

Laban's Religion.

Laban tells Jacob what he had power to do and what doubtless he would have done but for the warning from God the previous night. And so he contents himself by charging Jacob with the theft of his household gods. It is difficult to appraise at anything like a real spiritual value the religion of Laban. It seems to have been mainly of an indirect and second-hand character, a mixture of truth and error, a blending of a consciousness of the Divine presence with a belief in images. This superstitious use of household gods seems to have been a breach of the law of the second rather than of the first Commandment.

Jacob was of course entirely ignorant of Rachel's theft, and is therefore able to assert his innocence and allow Laban to search through the tents for the lost teraphim. Rachel was a true daughter of her father and a match for him in cunning. But she little knew the trouble she was bringing on Jacob and herself by this deceit.

Turning Homewards

VI. *The Vindication* (vers. 36-42).—The failure to discover the gods gave Jacob his opportunity to vindicate himself, and right bravely he does it. He recounts with telling force what he had done for Laban, and how he had been requited. And it should be carefully observed that the statements are allowed to 'pass unchallenged' (Driver, p. 290), a proof of their essential truth, for Laban was not the man to allow all this to be said if it had not been true. One thing at least cannot be laid to the charge of Jacob; he was not unfaithful in his long-continued service to Laban. These verses bear reading and pondering. Jacob clearly sees the true meaning of the Divine vision to Laban. It was nothing else than a rebuke for conduct that was in every way uncalled for and despicable. God may have much against His own servants which He will not allow to pass, but He will in any case defend their cause against the wrong-doer and champion them in the face of flagrant injustice. (Cf. Jer. xv. 19-21.)

VII. *The Covenant* (vers. 43-55).—Laban at length realises the true position of affairs, and proposes to end the feud by a covenant. A pillar is first of all raised, and then a heap of stones. The heap is called by Laban, in Syriac, 'Jegar-sahadutha' ('the heap of witness'), and by Jacob, in Hebrew, 'Galeed,' which has exactly the same meaning. The pillar is called 'Mizpah' ('watch tower'), and is regarded as the symbol of the Lord watching between the two parties to the covenant and keeping guard over the agreement, lest either

Genesis xxv. 11—xxxvi. 8

Gen. xxxi. should break it. Then comes the solemn oath in the Name of God, followed by the usual sacrifice and sacrificial feast. These two were now 'blood-brothers' (see Trumbull's *Blood-Covenant*), pledged to eternal unity and fealty. The next morning Laban and his followers returned, and Jacob and his household went on their journey.

It is impossible to avoid noticing the curious misconception of the term 'Mizpah' which characterises its use to-day. As used for a motto on rings, Christmas cards, and even as the title of an organisation, it is interpreted to mean union, trust, and fellowship; while its original meaning was that of separation, distrust, and warning. Two men, neither of whom trusted the other, said in effect: 'I cannot trust you out of my sight. The Lord must be the watchman between us if we and our goods are to be kept safe from each other.' Thus curiously does primary interpretation differ from spiritual application, and conveys a necessary admonition against the misuse of Scripture even by spiritual people.

Suggestions
for Medita-
tion.
God's Will
in Daily Life.

1. *The will of God in daily life.*—Mark carefully the steps by which Jacob was led to return home. They afford a striking lesson on the Divine methods of guidance. First of all a *desire* to go home sprang up in Jacob's heart. Then *circumstances* between him and Laban began to make it impossible for him to remain. The nest was being stirred up, and his position rendered intolerable by envy, jealousy, and injustice. And, lastly, came the

Turning Homewards

Divine *message* of command. Thus inward desire, **Gen. xxxi.** outward circumstances and the Divine word combined to make the pathway clear. This is ever the way of God's guidance; the conviction of the spirit within, the Word agreeing with it in principle, and then outward circumstances making action possible. When these three agree, we may be sure of right guidance. When the first two alone are clear, the way may be right, but the time is not yet come. When the third only is clear and the two former are not, we may be certain that the way is *not* right. Only let us be spiritually alert, and then 'the meek will He guide in judgment, the meek will He teach His way.'

2. *The acknowledgment of God in daily life.*— **God acknowledged in Daily Life.** We cannot fail to see the way in which Jacob, Leah, Rachel, and Laban, all in their turn and way, speak of God as either interposing on their behalf or else taking action to prevent them from accomplishing their purpose. Above all we observe the way in which Laban and Jacob make and complete the covenant, by invoking God's presence and power. It may not be possible always to discern God's hand aright, or to attribute to Him precisely the things that really come from Him, but it is surely one of the prime secrets of true life to be able to acknowledge God's presence and power, and to realise that there is 'a Divinity that shapes our ends.' The words of the wise man are as true to-day as ever, and true moreover, in spite of any mistakes we may make about God's hand: "In all thy ways acknowledge

Genesis xxv. 11—xxxvi. 8

Gen. xxxi. Him." To do this is to live as He desires us to live.

God's Providence in Daily Life.

3. *The Providence of God in daily life.*—Amid much that is sad and even sordid in this story; amid 'envy, hatred, malice, and all uncharitableness'; amid craft, deceit, and lying on almost every side, we cannot fail to see the hand of God overruling, and making even the wrath of man to praise Him. We are often perplexed by the problems of sin and freewill, and we are baffled as we try to think out how God's will can possibly be done amid all the perverseness of human nature. But we can learn much from a story like this, as we observe each actor a perfectly free agent and yet see everything taken up into the Divine purpose and made to serve far-reaching ends. We may well speak of God's providence—pro-vidence, His 'seeing beforehand' and making provision accordingly. It is this that gives quietness amidst perplexities, and enables the soul to rest in faith until all is made clear. God's providence is indeed the saints' inheritance.

X

GOD'S HOST FOR MAN'S HELP

GEN. xxxii. 1-23

1. And Jacob went on his way, and the angels of God met him.

2. And when Jacob saw them, he said, This is God's host : and he called the name of that place Mahanaim.

3. And Jacob sent messengers before him to Esau his brother unto the land of Seir, the country of Edom.

4. And he commanded them, saying, Thus shall ye speak unto my lord Esau ; Thy servant Jacob saith thus, I have sojourned with Laban, and stayed there until now :

5. And I have oxen, and asses, flocks, and menservants, and womenservants : and I have sent to tell my lord, that I may find grace in thy sight.

6. And the messengers returned to Jacob, saying We came to thy brother Esau, and also he cometh to meet thee, and four hundred men with him.

7. Then Jacob was greatly afraid and distressed : and he divided the people that was with him, and the flocks, and herds, and the camels, into two bands ;

8. And said, if Esau come to the one company, and smite it then the other company which is left shall escape.

9. And Jacob said, O God of my father Abraham, and God of my father Isaac, the Lord which saidst unto me, Return unto thy country, and to thy kindred, and I will deal well with thee.

10. I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth, which thou hast shewed unto thy servant ; for with my staff I passed over this Jordan ; and now I am become two bands.

11. Deliver me, I pray thee, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau ; for I fear him, lest he will come and smite me, and the mother with the children.

12. And thou saidst, I will surely do thee good, and make thy seed as the sand of the sea, which cannot be numbered for multitude.

Genesis xxv. 11—xxxvi. 8

13. And he lodged there that same night ; and took of that which came to his hand a present for Esau his brother ;

14. Two hundred she goats, and twenty he goats, two hundred ewes, and twenty rams,

15. Thirty milch camels, with their colts, forty kine, and ten bulls, twenty she asses, and ten foals.

16. And he delivered *them* into the hand of his servants, every drove by themselves ; and said unto his servants, Pass over before me, and put a space betwixt drove and drove.

17. And he commanded the foremost, saying, When Esau my brother meeteth thee, and asketh thee, saying, whose *art* thou? and whither goest thou? and whose *are* these before thee?

18. Then thou shalt say, *They be* thy servant Jacob's ; it is a present sent unto my lord Esau : and, behold, also he is behind us.

19. And so commanded he the second, and the third, and all that followed the droves, saying, On this manner shall ye speak unto Esau, when ye find him.

20. And say ye moreover, Behold, thy servant Jacob is behind us. For he said, I will appease him with the present that goeth before me, and afterward I will see his face ; peradventure he will accept of me.

21. So went the present over before him ; and himself lodged that night in the company.

22. And he rose up that night, and took his two wives, and his two womenservants, and his eleven sons, and passed over the ford Jabbok.

23. And he took them, and sent them over the brook, and sent over that he had.

Gen.
xxxii.
1-23.

GOD'S discipline for man sometimes takes the form of a lengthened process, like the years of Jacob with Laban. At other times it is experienced in the form of a short and perhaps sharp crisis, as at Bethel. We are now to consider another of these crises in the life of Jacob, a turning-point, a pivot in his career. Freed from the trammels endured at Haran, he soon becomes aware once again of the hand of God upon him and the Divine purpose concerning him. The grace of God which had never left him, is now to work upon

God's Host for Man's Help

him as never before. Let us mark closely the various stages of the process. Now and henceforward we shall see very clearly the conflict of nature and grace, and the way in which grace overcomes nature. There is scarcely any character in Scripture which is more full of profound yet practical lessons for the spiritual life.

Gen. xxxii. 1-23.

I. *Messengers of God* (vers. 1, 2).—Delivered from the thralldom of Laban's service Jacob goes on his way towards the old home, only to realise before long that another difficulty confronts him in his brother Esau. But between the two difficulties comes this timely revelation from God; 'the angels of God met him.' How and by what way this manifestation was vouchsafed, whether by waking vision or midnight dream, we know not. Suffice it to say that it was one more proof of the Divine assurance that Jacob should not be left until the purpose of God had been accomplished in him (xxviii. 15). The angels of God had come to him at Bethel (xxviii. 12) and in Haran (xxxi. 11), and now met him again.

I. Messengers of God (vers. 1, 2).

The ministry of angels to the children of God is one of the most interesting and precious elements of the Divine revelations in Scripture. No details are given to satisfy curiosity, but the fact is certain and the blessedness is real (Ps. xxxiv. 7; Dan. vi. 22; Heb. i. 14). And it is worth while remembering that angels, as they are brought before us in Holy Writ, are invariably depicted as the *servants* of the saints—their inferiors, not superiors. It is probably a mistake to think of angels as occupying

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an intermediate place between men and God, as something more than the one and less than the other. It may have been this error that has led to the worshipping of angels and the thought of them as mediators between an impure humanity and a holy God. Scripture, on the contrary, reveals them as always *ministers*, servants, of those who are higher than themselves in spiritual place and privilege, of those who are "heirs of salvation." (*Cf.* Heb. i. 14; 1 Pet. i. 12.)

Two Camps. This manifestation from God Jacob was quick to see. He recognised the Divine hand, and said, "This is God's host." Whatever may have happened during those years in Haran, Jacob still retained sufficient spiritual discernment to apprehend God's action in this meeting. And he at once raises a memorial of the occasion by calling it 'Mahanaim'—'Two Hosts' or 'Two Camps'—God's heavenly host and his own earthly host of possessions granted to him by God (xxxi. 9) and now to be protected by God. 'Whether visible to the eye of sense or, as would appear, only to the eye of faith, they *are* visible to this troubled man; and, in a glow of confident joy, he calls the name of that place "Mahanaim," Two Camps. One camp was the little one of his own down here, with the helpless women and children and his own frightened and defenceless self; and the other was the great one up there, or rather in shadowy but most real spiritual presence around about him, as a bodyguard making an impregnable wall between him and every foe' (Maclaren).

God's Host for Man's Help

On the first great occasion of his life he had **Gen.** raised his memorial and called it 'God's House' **xxxii.** (xxviii. 17). On this, the second great occasion, **I-23.** he is conscious of 'God's Host.' He has still a deeper experience to pass through before he can raise his third and crowning memorial to 'God's Face.'

II. *Messengers of Man* (vers. 3-6).—It is im- **II. Mes-**
possible to avoid seeing the connection and con- **sengers of**
trast between God's messengers to Jacob and **Man (vers.**
Jacob's messengers to Esau. The pity of it is that **3-6).**
Jacob did not fully learn the simple yet profound lesson of the connection. As he nears the borders of the old country, memory begins to move and conscience to work. He knows that there can be no peace and quiet until his relations with Esau are assured and put on a proper footing. Not until *that* matter was settled could Jacob feel certain of his future. Is not this a great principle of the spiritual life? We must put right what we know to be wrong before we can enjoy settled peace. Unconfessed sin, unforgiven wrong, must be dealt with and put right. Righteousness must precede peace (Isa. xxxii. 17; Ps. lxxxv. 10 and lxxii. 3).

Jacob's despatch of an embassy to his brother was obviously to feel his way, to learn Esau's mind towards him. But the obsequiousness of the message, with its repeated emphasis on 'my lord Esau' and 'thy servant Jacob,' does not sound well from one who had met the angels of God. The words indicate a servile fear that seems strange

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and surprising in one who had already been assured of the birthright and blessing, and whose personal position as the owner of great possessions surely warranted a higher tone. There is a world of difference between genuine repentance and grovelling humiliation. Jacob could have shown the one without the accompaniment of the other. The message is throughout marked by a spirit of fear of Esau which is unworthy of one who had received such assurances from God. But Jacob was probably not the first, as he certainly was not the last, to fail to realise the direct and causative influence of his intercourse with God on his intercourse with man. While he is in God's presence he seems to be learning aright his spiritual lessons; but when he is face to face with a crisis he forgets the assurances derived from God and proceeds to act for himself, as though his own initiative and natural powers were everything.

Esau's
Journey.

The messengers return and bring news of the coming of Esau to meet his brother, accompanied by 400 evidently armed men. Not a word of friendly greeting in response to the fawning message, not a single indication of reconciliation in spite of all the intervening years. Not even Jacob's reminder of his long sojourn with Laban 'until now,' with its implication of having left Esau free all this time, had sufficed to put matters right. The old hostility which had died down by lapse of time seems to have been roused up, and the impulsive, easily-stirred Esau sets out to meet Jacob with a retinue which appears to bode

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nothing but ill. It may have been done merely to Gen. frighten Jacob, or it may have been prompted by a xxxii. genuine determination to take revenge, but it had I-23. the immediate effect of driving Jacob into an exhibition of his old natural self, and thereby afforded a fresh proof of the small extent to which God's assurances of grace had as yet laid hold of his inner life.

III. *Fear of Man* (vers. 7, 8).—Jacob's intense III. Fear of Man (vers. 7, 8). fear and distress were evidently due to his conviction that Esau's coming meant hostility, that the past had not been forgotten or overlooked. But he soon recovers his balance, though, instead of at once casting himself on God, he begins his characteristic work of planning. Esau's host had for the time driven out of his mind the host of God, and now again he proceeds to display that natural resourcefulness which characterised him all his days from the beginning to the very end. He divided his possessions into two parts, so that in case Esau fell on one of them the other might escape and at least something be left. The employment of this stratagem clearly shows that with all his possessions armed resistance was quite impossible, and, still more, it shows that once again Jacob was not using for his own peace and assurance the real meaning of the revelation that God had vouchsafed to him. At that moment the 'angels of God' were not in his mind, or he might easily have remembered that they who were with him were more than all Esau's host (2 Kings vi. 16).

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IV. Fear of
God (vers.
9, 12).

IV. *Fear of God* (vers. 9-12).—And yet, in spite of all his clever planning, he cannot help turning to God, even though, like many others since, he arranges matters before he begins to pray (Acts i. 23, 24). He called God to help him in the due execution of his own projects, instead of reversing the order and asking, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" Let us now look at his prayer. It is worthy of careful consideration on several grounds; both for what it contains and also for what it lacks.

Jacob's
Prayer.

It is a prayer of real and yet partial faith (ver. 9). He calls on God, and so far well; yet is it not strange, after Bethel and Haran and Mahanaim, that he does not rise to the height of calling God his own God, but contents himself with the thought of God as the God of his fathers? Then, again, his faith is clear and true in his reminder to God of His commands and promises about the return from Haran, but is it not curious that he does not see that after these promises God would surely take care of him? By all means let us put God in remembrance and plead His promises, but let us also expect that God can and will fulfil His own word (Acts xxvii. 25). His faith, then, was real, but partial; true, but inadequate; and yet, though it is easy for us as we read the narrative to see where he failed, let us not forget that we are often doing the very same ourselves, with far greater light than Jacob had, and therefore with infinitely less reason. We must take care lest we miss the lesson for ourselves in all this, "lest we forget."

The prayer was also marked by true humility

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(ver. 10). He acknowledged his own unworthi-
ness of all that God had done to and for him, and
with heartfelt gratitude he testifies to the way in
which blessings had been showered on him. There
is perhaps nothing wanting here unless, as some
think, it be a consciousness of sin. Certainly we
find no indication that he realised any connection
between his present fear of Esau and the events
associated with the surreptitious possession of the
blessing. But in any case the spirit of this humility
is a marked advance on anything we have hitherto
seen in Jacob. God was indeed at work in his
soul.

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The prayer was also one of intensely earnest
entreaty (ver. 11). He cries out for fear of Esau,
and craves deliverance. He assigns as his reason
for protection the fear lest he, his wives, and
children should be destroyed by his passionate and
ruthless brother. The reference to the 'mother
with the children' is very touching and beautiful,
revealing the tenderness of Jacob's nature. And
yet it is impossible to overlook the characteristic
lack of faith whereby, after expressing this fear of
losing his children, he quotes God's promise about
those very children being "as the sand of the sea."
How like Jacob was this failure to draw the true
conclusion of faith from the premises of the Divine
promise! And if we call attention to it we are
not desirous of blaming him, so much as of using
his failure to point the moral for ourselves. "Hath
He said, and shall He not do it?"

The
Intensity of
his Prayer.

As we review this prayer we seem to see in it a

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revelation of a genuine work of grace after years of apparent fruitlessness. Like a stream that emerges into day after running for a long distance underground, Jacob's spiritual life comes out now after those years at Haran; and, though there is still much to seek, we can see the clear marks of the work of God directing, deepening, and purifying his soul. God had never left him (xxviii. 15), as these spiritual experiences abundantly indicate.

V. Dread of
Man (vers.
13-19).

V. *Dread of Man* (vers. 17-19).—Once again we seem to be brought face to face with the other and less worthy side of Jacob. After prayer he is planning again. What is the connection between his praying and his planning? Was the latter the due use of precautions? Was it the proper way of answering his own prayer? It would hardly seem so. It appears rather to be an expression of his intense fear. He proceeds to arrange his possessions into droves of cattle, with distances separating them. He is intent on appeasing Esau with a present, and with remarkable skill he brings train after train to lay siege to his brother. He piles present upon present to break down opposition. When he first sent messengers to Esau (ver. 3) there was no indication of any present, for he thought perhaps none would be needed; but now his great fear compels him to take these steps. He is still concerned to manage Esau, instead of letting God do it for him; and the message to the servants breathes the same spirit of obsequious cringing to his brother. Truly 'the fear of man bringeth a snare,' and it is only 'he who trusteth

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in the Lord' that is set on high above all such dread.

VI. *Distrust of God* (vers. 20-23).—It seems clear that all this careful preparation was unwarrantably made. We can see it now in the sequel (xxxiii. 9), but it was equally unwarranted before Esau appeared. The man who prayed that prayer (vers. 9-12) surely ought not to have spoken as he afterwards did (ver. 20). Had he not already forgotten his prayer? He was so filled with his own fears and projects that he quite failed to rest his heart on God and trust Him to plan and protect. If we express our needs in prayer, it is obviously unfitting to go on arranging and scheming as though we had never prayed. It is one thing to seek wisdom from God and trust Him for it; quite another to ask God's blessing on our own wisdom. And it was this that Jacob had to learn before he met Esau. Only when God had brought him to an utter end of himself could the true position be taken and the full blessing granted. Meanwhile we pause here to gather up some of the most obvious lessons for ourselves.

1. *God's provision comes just when it is needed.*—The angelic host appeared just after Jacob had left Laban and before he encountered Esau. God is never too soon and never too late. 'Thou *pre-ventest* him with the blessings of goodness.' The old theological phraseology of 'prevenient grace' embodies one of the profoundest and most precious truths of the spiritual life. God anticipates our

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VI. Distrust
of God
(vers. 20-23).

Suggestions
for Medita-
tion.

God's Pro-
vision is
always
timely.

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need, and provides His grace just when we require it. He sees beforehand, what we cannot see, the needs of the soul, and comes in love to meet them. Whatever the circumstance or emergency, God will be there; for not only has He said, 'I will not forsake thee' (that is, when once He has come), but also 'I will not fail thee' (that is, when the need first arises). As we go on our way we may rest assured that God's host will meet us.

God's Pro-
vision is
always
Appropriate
to our Needs.

2. *God's provision comes just as it is needed.*—Not only *when*, but *as*; not only timely, but appropriate. What was Jacob's one great need at that moment? Surely it was protection. And so God sent His *host* to assure him of it. God always suits His grace to His people's needs. When Israel was in Egypt they needed deliverance, and obtained it. When they reached Sinai they required instruction, and received the Law. When hostility from surrounding nations was at hand, then, and then only, came the entirely new title 'the Lord of *hosts*' (1 Sam. i. 3). So it is always. '*As . . . so.*' is God's great principle for His people. Whatever the need, that will be the nature and measure of the supply.

God's Pro-
vision should
remove Fear
of Man.

3. *God's provision should remove the fear of man.*—The Divine revelation to Jacob was intended to do for him exactly what he needed most, and yet he never really lost the fear of his brother. He could not fully trust God. He 'committed his way to the Lord,' but did not 'trust *also* in Him.' He still carried his burden himself, even after God's angels came, and after his own prayer to God.

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And yet God's grace is intended to be a reality in our lives. We miss very much when we do not trust Him fully. If only the swimmer yields to the water, the water bears him up; but if he continues to struggle, the result is disastrous. Let us learn to trust, just as we learn to float.

4. *God's provision renders clever scheming unnecessary and even sinful.*—There is a very true sense in which everyone who prays must also use means. 'Trust in God and keep your powder dry.' But there is an equally true sense in which anxiety about means and methods is the very reverse of the right attitude for the believer. Jacob's heart was more set on planning than on praying. He plans before and after his prayer. He asks God, it is true, but almost at the same time he seems to feel that he must depend entirely on his own resources. He leans on his plan more than on his prayer; indeed, as we read of the plans, we forget that he ever prayed, and he apparently forgot it also. To the true believer, the man of real faith in God, there will be no real difficulty as to the relation of prayer and work. His work, as well as his prayer, will be manifestly permeated by trust in God. There is a very real sense in which *orare est laborare*; for the man who prays trustfully, restfully, hopefully, will find heart and mind so taken up with God that instinctively he will be led to adopt such methods as will reveal his trust and answer his own prayer. The soul that is truly and fully occupied with God will never be at a loss to know the true relation between prayer and work, work and prayer; for in

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God's Pro-
vision should
end Clever
Scheming.

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answer to prayer comes the spirit of wisdom, the spirit of a sound mind, the spirit of courage and fearlessness, the spirit of calm restfulness and equally calm progress. It will know when to 'stand still' and when to 'go forward,' because God is its all in all.

NOTE.—The word rendered 'appease' in verse 20 is *kipper*, the word afterwards used for 'covering' or 'atonement.' This is its first occurrence in the Bible (xx. 16 is different, but allied in thought), and, according to the principle of first occurrences in Scripture (see on xv. 1-4), the usage here helps to interpret the true meaning of atonement.

XI

PENIEL—THE FACE OF GOD

GEN. xxxii. 24-32

24. And Jacob was left alone; and there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day.

25. And when he saw that he prevailed not against him, he touched the hollow of his thigh; and the hollow of Jacob's thigh was out of joint as he wrestled with him.

26. And he said, Let me go, for the day breaketh. And he said, I will not let thee go, except thou bless me.

27. And he said unto him, What is thy name? And he said, Jacob.

28. And he said, Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel: for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed.

29. And Jacob asked *him*, and said, Tell *me*, I pray thee, thy name. And he said, Wherefore *is* it *that* thou dost ask after my name? And he blessed him there.

30. And Jacob called the name of the place Peniel: for I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved.

31. And as he passed over Penuel the sun rose upon him, and he halted upon his thigh.

32. Therefore the children of Israel eat not of the sinew which shrank, which *is* upon the hollow of the thigh, unto this day: because he touched the hollow of Jacob's thigh in the sinew that shrank.

THE one absorbing thought with Jacob was his meeting with Esau. It never seems to have occurred to him that there was a far greater need—a meeting with God. Still less did he imagine that there could be any connection between the two meetings, that his meeting with God would

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prove the best preparation for meeting his brother. These two thoughts sum up the story before us: Jacob must meet God before he meets Esau, and the one meeting will be the only and sufficient way of preparing for the other. We are thus able to understand what a spiritual crisis this was to Jacob, and we can also perceive, what Jacob did not, how lovingly God provided for this by the embassy of the angels (ver. 1). More than this, we can see in the story an illustration of God's dealings with His children to-day. Are we faced with some difficult problem? Are we opposed by some apparently insuperable obstacle? Are we at our wits' end in view of some terrible need? Let us learn from the story of Jacob to put God first, and thereby to discover the secret of all real spiritual power and blessing.

The story brings before us a striking contrast of the human and the Divine, and reveals the way in which the human is met, dealt with, overcome, and blessed by the Divine. Step by step as the narrative is unfolded we observe this contrast between nature and grace, between man and God, between self-effort and Divine power.

Human Soli-
tude (ver. 24).

I. *Human Solitude* (ver. 24).—Jacob had sent all his family, household, and possessions over the ford Jabbok. But for some reason or other he remained that night on the opposite bank; he was 'left alone.' Why was this? He was clearly conscious that a great crisis had come in his life. Anything might happen on the next morning when Esau and his four hundred men arrived. He had

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planned and prayed, prayed and planned, and now there was nothing more for him to do. Inaction was the most difficult of all things for so resourceful and energetic a nature. For Jacob to *wait*, instead of to work, was the greatest of all efforts. And yet there he was, in the darkness of the night, alone, with all the events of the past day clear before him, with all the awful possibilities of the coming day well in view. Why, then, was he alone? Is there any spiritual meaning in it? Was there a spiritual need expressed by this sending over all his household and himself remaining outside the promised land? Was there any idea of the blessing of solitude as 'the mother-country of the strong?' It is difficult to say, but the probability is that this solitude was merely for the purpose of taking every possible precaution. He had arranged his present to 'appease' his brother, he had sent over the ford all that was nearest and most precious to him, and now he remains alone on guard, ready for any emergency, or any attack under cover of the night. Alert as ever, he will leave nothing to chance; he will not even sleep.

II. *Divine Discipline* (ver. 24).—Suddenly he is conscious of an assailant. A man wrestles with him. At once, the courageous, resourceful Jacob closes with this opponent. It would seem as though Jacob regarded him as an emissary of Esau who had come to bar his way to the promised land. As such he is to be resisted and opposed with all possible strength. The struggle went on until day-break, and all the while it was not Esau or any of

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II. Divine
Discipline
(ver. 24).

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The True
Meaning
of the
Encounter.

his men. Let us mark carefully the description: 'There wrestled a man *with him*.' It is sometimes read as though Jacob wrestled with the man, and from it is derived the lesson of prevailing prayer. But this is to mistake altogether the point of the story. 'There wrestled a man *with him*.' The wrestling was an endeavour on God's part to break down Jacob's opposition, to bring him to an end of himself, to take from him all self-trust, all confidence in his own cleverness and resource, to make him know that Esau is to be overcome and Canaan obtained not by craft or flattery, but by Divine grace and power. There is no lesson at all on prevailing prayer. Far from it; quite the opposite. The self-life in Jacob is to be overcome, the old nature is to be conquered, the planning is to be rendered futile, and the resourcefulness made impotent. Instead of gaining Canaan by cleverness he must receive it as a gift from God. Instead of winning he must accept it from Divine grace.

Was this a literal physical struggle? Most assuredly it was. The outcome shows this very clearly (vers. 25, 31, 32). And yet the physical aspect is subservient to the spiritual, the bodily weakness was to be a symbol of the spiritual need of the man.

III. Human
Opposition
(ver. 25).

III. *Human Opposition* (ver. 25).—In the darkness of the night Jacob did not realise who and what his assailant was. And so he put forth all his resources of bodily vigour. Keyed up by the stirring events of the preceding day, and remembering that all his precious possessions were involved,

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to say nothing of his own life, he resisted this powerful opponent, and the struggle remained in the balance hour after hour. His pertinacity was marvellous! Here was no coward, no poltroon, but a man of unbounded energy, ready to fight for his own to the last.

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How like he is to many of us to-day! We do not realise that all these untoward circumstances, these perplexities, these sorrows, are part of the Divine discipline, and intended to bring us to the end of ourselves. And so we struggle, and strive, and fight, and resist, and all to no purpose. God had been trying to get Jacob to trust Him all these years. He met him at Bethel with vision and promises, and yet how poor was the response (xxviii.). He met him again during those years in Haran, using disappointment (xxix.), trouble (xxx.), and opposition (xxxi.) to lead to trust, but to little or no effect. And then came the angelic host (xxxii. 1 *ff.*); but its effect was only transient, the self-effort was soon in the ascendant again. And now comes the crowning attempt to break down this man's self-confidence and lead him to lean, to trust, to wait on his covenant God. But he will not, he cannot; he must oppose, he must resist, he must act for himself. He might pray, and pray earnestly, but he must also act; and act he did, though the net result was only to thwart and delay the Divine purpose concerning him. So it is often with us; we refuse to trust God, to put Him first, in spite of all the assurance of His love and the revelation of His grace through many a long year.

The Use of
Divine
Discipline.

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IV. Divine
Power
(ver. 25).

But God did not leave Jacob, and He does not leave us.

IV. *Divine Power* (ver. 25).—At last Jacob was made to realise the true state of affairs. So marvellous was the human opposition that nothing short of a special manifestation of Divine power would suffice to break it down. God could have done this earlier in the struggle, but He would not, for He wanted Jacob's willing surrender. Yet at length, as He could not obtain this, there was nothing else to be done but to deal with him in severity, and by an assertion of Divine power to bring this masterful man to an end of himself. God wished Jacob to realise that only by Divine grace he could meet Esau and enter Canaan; that he could not overcome by guile and enter by cleverness; that only by mercy, grace, and favour could his difficulties be met and his way prospered. And so 'He touched the hollow of his thigh,' took away the very power required for wrestling, brought him by one swift blow to the very end of his resources, and left him utterly powerless. Thus Divine love dealt with him in mercy and taught him, albeit in severity, the one lesson he needed most to learn.

Coming to
an end of
Ourselves.

Here again we see ourselves and God's dealing with us. God must bring us to Himself, and He can only do this by bringing us to an end of ourselves. And because of our senseless resistance and dull inability to see His fatherly hand in discipline, He has to touch our natural powers and resources, and reduce us to impotence before He can teach us

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the needed lesson and bestow the needed grace. **Gen.**
And yet His 'touch' is always one of love, of **xxxii.**
wisdom, of mercy, if only we would see it. **24-32.**

V. *Human Helplessness* (ver. 26).—As the dawn came on, Jacob recognised the mysterious assailant. No longer able to wrestle, he began to cling. Instead of opposition came tenacity, and Jacob proved himself to possess the latter as fully as the former. Disabled at the very point of strength for wrestling, Jacob could do nothing but cling. From cunning to clinging, from resisting to resting—this was the literal and symbolical experience of the crafty but now conquered Jacob. His words, 'I will not let Thee go except Thou bless me,' are clear evidence of the change in him. He is conscious at last of the futility of all his efforts to appease Esau and overcome his animosity, and now he clings to God and seeks for blessing. At last he is in the right position, but at what cost! If only he had learnt the lesson sooner, how much trouble and anxiety he would have been spared! No fears of Esau, no need of planning to appease him, no concern for his wives and children, nothing but rest of heart in the love of God. Ah! if only he had learnt the lesson of Bethel, and the lesson of Haran, and the lesson of Mahanaim! But now it is learnt, and God is better to him than all his fears. What he struggled for, he lost; what he trusted for, he gained. So it is always. It is always worth while to trust God and put Him first.

VI. *Divine Blessing* (vers. 27-29).—'Except Thou bless me' was Jacob's desire (ver. 26). 'And He **VI. Divine Blessing**
(vers. 27-29).

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blessed him there' was the Divine answer (ver. 29). But what was included in that Divine blessing? Very much that concerned Jacob's life and experience.

A new character was to be his. He is asked his name, and is compelled to call himself Jacob, 'Supplanter.' But this is to be changed to 'Israel,' 'God's Prince' or 'God's Perseverer' (Driver); the one who is no longer the crafty one, but he who is worthy to prevail, to lead, to rule, to overcome.

A new power was also to be his. He had experienced power with God by clinging. He is now to have power with man by reason of having power with God. (*Cf.* Hos. xii. 3, 4.) When God is put first, power with man naturally and necessarily follows. The gloss of the Septuagint and the Vulgate seems to give the true idea of the verse: 'Thou hast had power with God; much more shalt thou prevail with men.' The one is the guarantee of the other.

A new experience was also to be his. The Divine Angel could ask Jacob's name (ver. 27), but Jacob was not allowed to know the Angel's (ver. 29; *cf.* Judg. xiii. 17). There seems little doubt that this was a Divine manifestation, not the visit of a created angel. (*Cf.* Gen. xviii. 1, 2, 16, 22.) But if Jacob might not know His name, he could experience His blessing, for 'He blessed him there.'

VII. Human
Gratitude
(ver. 30).

VII. *Human Gratitude* (ver. 30).—As on previous occasions, Jacob again raised his 'Ebenezer,' and made a memorial of the experience which had been vouchsafed to him. He called the name

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of the place 'Peniel,' God's Face, in token of that wonderful bestowal of God's favour and of the preservation of his life (Exod. xxxiii. 20 ; Deut. iv. 33 ; Judg. vi. 22 *f.* and xiii. 22). He realised, in some measure at least, what it meant. God had met him, taught him, blessed him ; and now he could meet Esau without fear, and face any emergency, in the strength of that glorious vision.

Gen. xxxii. 24-32.

VIII. *Divine Glory* (vers. 31, 32).—'The sun rose upon him.' There was sunshine within as well. The sun seemed brighter than ever that morning, and the very face of nature seemed changed by reason of that vision of the face of God. The sun of God's glory was reflected on Jacob's face too, and though he had to bear the marks of that contest (ver. 31), and though there was to be a perpetual record of it in the days to come (ver. 32), yet it had all been worth while, for the grace of God had overcome the self-effort of man, the fear of God had displaced the fear of man, the power of God had given assurances as to the power of man. Jacob was now a monument of Divine grace, and was intended henceforth to live to the Divine glory. Thus God justified and vindicated Himself in the life of His unworthy servant, 'to the praise of the glory of His grace.' Thus God's loving sympathy, marvellous patience, and perfect wisdom shone forth in His dealings with Jacob ; grace was glorified, and God Himself magnified.

VIII. Divine Glory (vers. 31, 32).

(For a summary of the true meaning of this episode, see the suggestive note in Driver's *Genesis*, p. 296).

Genesis xxv. 11—xxxvi. 8

Gen.
xxxii.
24-32.

Suggestions
for Medita-
tion.

Peniel was a noteworthy landmark in Jacob's spiritual history. It was the third occasion and culminating-point of a special Divine revelation. The first was Bethel, where 'the House of God' reminded and assured him of the Divine *Presence*. The second was Mahanaim, where the 'Host of God' taught him the Divine *Power*. The third was Peniel, where he was led beyond the ideas of God's presence and power to that of Divine *Favour* and *Fellowship*. The 'Face' of God is used constantly in Scripture as a symbol of favour, friendship, fellowship (Exod. xxxiii. 11, 20; Deut. xxxiv. 10), and in the believer's life fellowship is the highest of our spiritual privileges (1 John i. 3). God desired and purposed to bring Jacob into this position of blessedness and power; and all the Divine dealings, from Bethel onwards, were intended to lead up to this. So it is now; everything that God has for us is expressed in terms of union and communion of which the New Testament is so full. What, then, will this fellowship accomplish?

Fellowship
transforms
Character.

1. *The 'Face of God' is the place of transformation of character.*—Fellowship with God changes Jacobs to Israels. 'Beholding . . . we are being changed.' From this time onward there was a very distinct change in Jacob; and although the old nature was still there, Peniel had its effect and exercised transforming influence. There is nothing like fellowship with God to change and transfigure our nature.

Fellowship
gives Power.

2. *The 'Face of God' is the place of power for daily life.*—Like Jacob, we have to meet our Esaus

Peniel—The Face of God

and we are afraid. We strive, plan, struggle, and all to no purpose. But we see God's Face, and all is changed. Power with man comes from power with God. We have, it may be, a crisis to-day; but first of all we pray, and the victory is gained. We wonder who will roll away the stone, but find that it is already gone. Fellowship with God gives insight and foresight, peace and patience, calm and courage in every emergency, and enables us to become 'more than conquerors' over every foe. Just as power with God came by surrender, so also will power with men come by willing self-sacrifice on their behalf. Self is the greatest foe to blessing from God or influence with men.

3. *The 'Face of God' is the place of spiritual blessing.*—In the presence of God it is impossible to use carnal weapons. 'If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me.' When Jacob came to an end of struggling and commenced clinging, the blessing quickly came. Jacob hitherto had no idea of a blessing obtained by passive receptiveness. But in the life of a true believer God's best gifts come that way. Gain comes by loss, gathering by scattering. So it must be always. Fellowship with God dispenses with subterfuges, natural craft, and clever resourcefulness. The wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. Blessing must be obtained in the right way or not at all. The supreme need of man is the grace of God, and this is not only independent of, but opposed to all that is merely earthly and human. Just as salvation is of God by grace, so is every

Gen. xxxii.
24-32.

Fellowship
bestows
Blessing.

Genesis xxv. 11—xxxvi. 8

Gen.
xxxii.
24-32.

spiritual blessing derived in the same way. Whether we think of the individual believer or the community of God's people, all grace comes through fellowship with God. Not by unworthy expedients, not by mere human effort, not by natural energy, but in union and communion with God all grace and blessing become ours. We *must* see the Face of God.

XII

AFTER PENIEL

GEN. xxxiii.

1. And Jacob lifted up his eyes, and looked, and, behold, Esau came, and with him four hundred men. And he divided the children unto Leah, and unto Rachel, and unto the two handmaids.

2. And he put the handmaids and their children foremost, and Leah and her children after, and Rachel and Joseph hindermost.

3. And he passed over before them, and bowed himself to the ground seven times until he came near to his brother.

4. And Esau ran to meet him, and embraced him, and fell on his neck, and kissed him : and they wept.

5. And he lifted up his eyes, and saw the women and the children ; and said Who *are* those with thee ? And he said, The children which God hath graciously given thy servant.

6. Then the handmaidens came near, they and their children, and they bowed themselves.

7. And Leah also with her children came near, and bowed themselves : and after came Joseph near and Rachel, and they bowed themselves.

8. And he said, What *meanest* thou by all this drove which I met ? And he said, *These are* to find grace in the sight of my lord.

9. And Esau said, I have enough, my brother ; keep that thou hast unto thyself.

10. And Jacob said, Nay, I pray thee, if now I have found grace in thy sight, then receive my present at my hand ; for therefore I have seen thy face as though I had seen the face of God, and thou wast pleased with me.

11. Take, I pray thee, my blessing that is brought to thee ; because God hath dealt graciously with me, and because I have enough. And he urged him, and he took *it*.

Genesis xxv. 11—xxxvi. 8

12. And he said, Let us take our journey, and let us go, and I will go before thee.

13. And he said unto him, My lord knoweth that the children *are* tender, and the flocks and herds with young *are* with me: and if men should overdrive them one day, all the flock will die.

14. Let my lord, I pray thee, pass over before his servant; and I will lead on softly, according as the cattle that goeth before me and the children be able to endure, until I come unto my lord unto Seir.

15. And Esau said, Let me now leave with thee *some* of the folk that *are* with me. And he said, What needeth it? let me find grace in the sight of my lord.

16. So Esau returned that day on his way unto Seir.

17. And Jacob journeyed to Succoth, and built him an house, and made booths for his cattle: therefore the name of the place is called Succoth.

18. And Jacob came to Shalem, a city of Shechem, which is in the land of Canaan, when he came from Padan-aran; and pitched his tent before the city.

19. And he bought a parcel of a field, where he had spread his tent, at the hand of the children of Hamor, Shechem's father, for an hundred pieces of money.

20. And he erected there an altar, and called it El-elohe-Israel.

Gen.
xxxiii.

WHEN the Angel at Peniel said, 'Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel,' the obvious meaning was that from that time forward the man was to be known by the new name only. In similar cases of change of name, Abram to Abraham, Saul to Paul, Simon to Peter, the new name persisted and, at least with Abraham and Paul, the old one was never used again. But what do we find in the story of Jacob? This; that after Peniel the name 'Jacob' occurs no less than forty-five times, while 'Israel' appears only twenty-three times. And what is equally significant, the usage to which we are familiar is 'Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob,' not 'Abraham, Isaac and Israel.'

After Peniel

Why, then, did not the name 'Jacob' disappear entirely and 'Israel' take its place? Was it not because Jacob went back from the new position and privilege given him at Peniel? He did not continue true to that Divine revelation; he did not abide in the position and power of a 'Prince of God.' It is unutterably sad when a believer recedes from a high position of spiritual privilege. To be disobedient to the heavenly vision and revert to the old type of life is one of the most terrible of sorrows and one of the profoundest of mysteries. It is bad for a man to refuse God altogether; it is in some ways infinitely worse for a believer to lose position, peace, and power through unfaithfulness. Let us give heed to this story of Jacob's failure, and as we mark his steps backward let us ponder well the secret of his fall.

I. *First Step Backward* (vers. 1-11).—The next morning after Peniel Jacob had yet to face his great problem of the meeting with Esau. The difficulty was still there, Esau and his 400 men, and not even the intercourse with God had removed it. But that intercourse provided him with the secret and means of victory over it if only he had used the opportunity. God does not always see fit to remove obstacles from our pathway, but He always gives power to triumph over them. Instead, however, of Jacob meeting Esau 'in the strength of that meat' received by Peniel, we find him still actuated by fear. Leaving household and cattle as arranged the preceding day (xxxii. 7, 8), he

I. First
Step Back-
ward (vers.
1-11).

Genesis xxv. 11—xxxvi. 8

Gen.
xxxiii.

makes a new disposition of his wives and children, placing them in such order that the best-loved are hindermost. Thus he prepares for the worst, still contemplating the possibility, not to say the probability, of Esau's vengeance. The fear of man still brings a snare.

The Meeting
of the
Brothers.

Then, putting himself at the head of his family procession, he goes forward to meet his brother, bowing with very great deference—far in excess, so it would seem, even of the customary Oriental courtesy. He is intent on showing his brother all possible consideration, and apparently means to acknowledge Esau's superior prerogatives. This, after obtaining the birthright and blessing is strange, and perhaps is intended as a tacit acknowledgment of his old sin of craft and deceit. But be this as it may, the response of Esau is very striking. He runs to meet Jacob, and they greet each other amid tokens of genuine feeling. Esau's anger had gone in the rush of emotion on seeing his brother after all those years of separation. Rebekah was quite right in her knowledge of her elder son's feelings. He was impulsive, hasty, passionate, but his anger did not last; there was no brooding revenge, no malevolence. And thus, in an instant, Jacob's fears were proved to be groundless, and all his elaborate precautions for safety seen to be entirely unnecessary.

After making the acquaintance of Jacob's family, Esau naturally asked the meaning of 'all this drove' that he had met. He was told that it was present, 'to find grace in the eyes of my lord.'

After Peniel

But all this obsequiousness also proved quite unnecessary, for Esau refused the present, saying that he already had enough. Jacob thereupon pressed him to take it, urging as his reason that he was grateful for his favourable reception. He felt that just as God had received him graciously, so Esau's favour was now equally evident, and in token of his gratitude he pressed the gift upon him.

It is, however, hardly possible to avoid seeing in this urgency a desire on the part of Jacob to purchase Esau's goodwill. He knew his brother's fickleness, and was therefore determined to take every possible precaution. We cannot but feel that Jacob does not come quite worthily out of this meeting. After Peniel it does not read well. In the face of that guarantee of power and grace we are disappointed to read of further precautions, manifest fear, obvious fawning, and continued planning. Jacob has still to learn the lesson of absolute trust in his God. It is worthy of note that all the recognition of God was on his side (vers. 5, 10, 11), not on Esau's; but in spite of it all we feel that he did not remain on the high level of Peniel, or derive all the spiritual power he might have obtained from that memorable occasion of fellowship with God.

II. *Second Step Backward* (vers. 12-17).—Esau proposed that they should journey together, he and his men going forward as the escort. This suggestion was another mark of friendliness, and here we cannot help observing how splendidly

Gen. xxxiii.

The Lesson Unlearned.

II. Second Step Backward (vers. 12-17).

Genesis xxv. 11—xxxvi. 8

Gen.
xxxiii.

Esau showed up on this occasion. Warmth, generosity, unselfishness, willingness to help, friendliness—all these features characterised him. Men of the world often put to shame the children of God in the manifestation of the practical virtues of life. Yet this ought not to be so.

Jacob met this generous proposal in a very characteristic way, and thereby gave another revelation of himself. He called attention to the little children and to the flocks and herds with their young, and pleaded quite naturally for a slow journey, as the children and cattle could bear it. But it was a polite though shrewd way of declining his brother's invitation. He was evidently still mindful of the diversity of their temperaments, and feared that if they were long together, some occasion of friction would arise and again sever their friendly relations. There was, quite probably, real worldly wisdom in this attitude of Jacob. He had a keener insight into the facts of the case than his more superficial brother. Yet we would rather have seen a hearty response to the proposal and a more definite trust in God as to the consequences. And certainly we could have easily dispensed with the renewed obsequiousness that marked Jacob's language to Esau. It was surely unworthy of a brother to a brother, an equal to an equal—yea, rather a child of God to a man of the world. If a believer has to refuse a request to a non-Christian he should not be afraid to give the right reason for his refusal. Testimony to truth, if given in the

Worldly
Wisdom is
not always
worthy.

After Peniel

right spirit and with a right motive, will never be allowed to do harm. Gen.
xxxiii.

But, whatever may be said of all this, there is one point in the narrative in which Jacob clearly does definite wrong. In declining Esau's invitation to journey together on account of his own need of a slower progress Jacob distinctly promised to re-join Esau in Seir. Whereupon Esau naturally offered to leave some of his men as a guide and escort. This again Jacob very politely declined (ver. 15), and at length Esau departed. What, then, was Jacob's next step? Actually this: instead of going after Esau to Seir, which was situated south-east of Peniel, he took his journey in an exactly opposite direction, and went to Succoth, north-west of Peniel. And thus he took the second step backward, deceiving his brother once again. It is surely impossible even to palliate this falsehood. Fresh
Deception. As he had not the courage to give his brother the real reason of his declining the journey together, so also he told an untruth in order to put as much distance as he could between them. We wonder what Esau must have thought when he found Jacob did not arrive. We wonder whether he discounted Jacob's references to God which he had made on their meeting together. What is the use of our pious verbal acknowledgment of God if we deny Him by our actions and give cause to the men of the world to reflect on our profession of religion and even to blaspheme it? How long will it be before we learn that orthodoxy of profession with unreality of con-

Genesis xxv. 11—xxxvi. 8

Gen.
xxxiii.

III. Third
Step Back-
ward (ver.
17).

Bethel
forgotten.

duct is the most deplorable combination in this world?

III. *Third Step Backward* (ver. 17).—Jacob did not content himself with a temporary stay at Succoth. He 'built him a house and made booths for his cattle.' Hitherto he had lived the pilgrim life, as his father and grandfather before him; but now he seeks for something more permanent, and builds a house. A tent was no longer sufficient for him. But it may be asked, Was this wrong? Not *per se*, perhaps, and yet pretty certainly wrong for him. There are many things not essentially sinful which become sinful under particular circumstances. Jacob had forgotten his vow at Bethel (xxviii. 21), and by making Succoth so evidently his home he was showing himself to be on a very low spiritual level in his forgetfulness of the claim of God upon him. When God revealed Himself in Haran it was as 'the God of Bethel' (xxx. 13), and the reminder at that time of the vow made by Jacob was evidence of the prominent and even predominant place Bethel was intended to occupy in the subsequent life of the patriarch. He thus fails to rise to the full height of God's purpose. He had overlooked all this, and was settling down, at any rate for a time, in earthly ease and prosperity. There were no fine pastures at Bethel! How easily we forget our Bethels and all that we have promised God! How disappointing to God must be the failures and unfaithfulness of His servants! How sad to ignore in prosperity the vows we made when we were in

After Peniel

danger! And yet, alas! how true this is to life to-day!

Gen.
xxxiii.

IV. *Fourth Step Backward* (vers. 18-20).—After a time Succoth was left, and Jacob journeyed on. we read the R.V., he 'came in peace to the city of Shechem,' which reminds us of his vow (xxviii. 21, 'in peace'), although he did not go back to Bethel. In this case Shechem is the name of the owner of the place. (Cf. xxxiv. 2). If, however, we read the A.V., he 'came to Shalem,' a city in the country or neighbourhood of what was afterwards Shechem or Sychar (John iv. 5; Acts vii. 16). In pitching his tent 'before the city' we see another indication of his low spiritual condition. If he had been true to God he would have recognised his danger in the proximity to the inhabitants of the land. And, as we know, this nearness brought untold trouble upon him.

IV. Fourth
Step Back-
ward (ver.
18-20).

Then, again, he bought some property there, purchasing the land on which his tent was pitched. He was thus actually buying his own promised possessions, the land assured to him by God! Was this necessary? Surely not. Abraham's purchase was for a very different reason. Why could not Jacob trust God, as Abraham had done? It was because his faith could not rise to the occasion. Jacob's motto was 'A bird in hand is worth two in the bush,' and apart from God the motto is no doubt full of wisdom. But when God is first in the life it makes all the difference. To the man of the world faith is unreal, there is nothing tangible about it; to him 'seeing is believing.' But to the

When God
is not first.

Genesis xxv. 11—xxxvi. 8

Gen.
xxxiii.

believer faith is a reality; to him 'seeing is believing.' 'Faith is the *title-deed* [so ὑπόστασις in the Papyri] of things hoped for, the proof of things unseen' (Heb. xi. 1). If Jacob had possessed Abraham's faith he would not have bought an inch of ground.

Disobedience
not covered
by Devotion.

But this was not all. Jacob proceeded to erect an altar in this place. He thought to counteract his disobedience by consecration to God. He had no right to be there at all. Bethel, not Shechem, was the place for the altar. Worldliness in the week-days is not overcome by early Communion on Sundays. Unfaithfulness to God in daily duty is not set aside by having family prayers night and morning, and Bible readings for our neighbours. Meanness to employés is not obliterated by a large gift to the Hospital Sunday Fund or the cause of foreign Missions. Even the name of the altar, 'God the God of Israel,' seems to indicate a low tone, in its reference to himself, especially as he was not living the life of 'Israel,' the Prince of God. The sin lay in being 'near the city,' and indeed in being there at all. And the results as we shall see were disastrous, as they always are when people try to blend worldliness and godliness, Society and Christ, Mammon and God. The world always wins; religion always recedes.

Suggestions
for Medita-
tion.

1. *The awful possibilities of spiritual degeneration.*—Jacob's experiences after Peniel are a solemn reminder that Conversion (Bethel) and Consecration

After Peniel

(Peniel) are no guarantees of abiding faithfulness. **Gen. xxxiii.** They need to be followed by Concentration and Continuance. There are frequent hints throughout Holy Scripture of the ghastly possibilities of spiritual relapse after the most exalted fellowship with God. We think of David's sin after such a revelation as is recorded in 2 Sam. vii. We think of Simon Peter's denial after Cæsarea Philippi (Matt. xvi.) and after the Transfiguration (Matt. xvii.). And we remember the solemn warning of Heb. v. 12, 14, with its revelation of the awful possibility of spiritual senility, of *second childhood* (γεγόνατε, *have become*, vers. 11, 12). It is possible for one who has had great spiritual insight, received great spiritual gifts, done great spiritual service, to lose all by unfaithfulness. Backsliding is a terrible and awful fact, and sometimes the higher the rise the lower the fall. Spiritual experience, however true and rich, does not exempt from danger; rather does it call for greater watchfulness. 'So Daniel continued.' The grace of continuance is the greatest need of all. Have we not, perhaps, heard of some servant of God who had been honoured and blessed, and afterwards fell into sin and shame? Can we not, perchance, think of some who commenced their Christian life, and it may be their ministry, full of hope and promise, but who are now 'unfulfilled prophecies,' by reason of lack of faithfulness to the heavenly vision? They have virtually ceased to pray, practically ceased to meditate on the Bible, ceased to be unworldly; they have adopted unworthy methods in

Spiritual
Degenera-
tion.

Genesis xxv. 11—xxxvi. 8

Gen.
xxxiii.

their ministry, pandered to worldliness and earthly ambitions, and the result is dulness, darkness, dryness, deadness in life and ministry, souls not being saved, believers not being quickened, everything stale and unprofitable in their service. They are 'cast away,' not in the sense of losing their salvation, but of having lost their usefulness. They are 'disapproved,' rejected, set aside. While the regenerate can never become *unregenerate*, he can, alas! become *degenerate*, and herein lies one of the gravest perils of the Christian life. Moody once said to Canon Hay Aitken that the one thing he feared most was the loss of his testimony for Christ. 'I saw that there was a way to hell even from the gates of heaven, as well as from the City of Destruction.'

Secret of
Spiritual
Stability.

2. *The simple secret of spiritual stability.*—This lies in obedience to the heavenly vision, faithfulness to the heavenly voice. If only Jacob had kept God first, and refused to listen to the voice of self, how different would have been his record! With absolute trust in God would have come victory over temptation, courage in danger, and preservation from worldliness. We fail because we distrust God, and distrusting we disobey Him. God's grace is sufficient for every emergency, and the light granted at Peniel would have detected every danger and protected from every disaster. Every spiritual victory lifts us to a higher plane of power and blessing, and thus we go on from 'strength to strength,' from "glory to glory." There is no need for failure, for backsliding, for defeat, but every

After Peniel

warrant for progress, power and preservation. **Gen.**
We have only to obey the vision vouchsafed **xxxiii.**
to us, to appropriate the grace provided for us,
in order to experience stability, strength and
ever-growing satisfaction, to the glory and praise
of God.

XIII

RESULTS OF UNFAITHFULNESS

GEN. xxxiv.

1. And Dinah the daughter of Leah, which she bare unto Jacob, went out to see the daughters of the land.

2. And when Shechem the son of Hamor the Hivite, prince of the country, saw her, he took her, and lay with her, and defiled her.

3. And his soul clave unto Dinah the daughter of Jacob, and he loved the damsel, and spake kindly unto the damsel.

4. And Shechem spake unto his father Hamor, saying, Get me this damsel to wife.

5. And Jacob heard that he had defiled Dinah his daughter : now his sons were with his cattle in the field : and Jacob held his peace until they were come.

6. And Hamor the father of Shechem went out unto Jacob to commune with him.

7. And the sons of Jacob came out of the field when they heard *it* ; and the men were grieved, and they were very wroth, because he had wrought folly in Israel in lying with Jacob's daughter ; which thing ought not to be done.

8. And Hamor communed with them, saying, The soul of my son Shechem longeth for your daughter : I pray you give her him to wife.

9. And make ye marriages with us, *and* give your daughters unto us, and take our daughters unto you.

10. And ye shall dwell with us : and the land shall be before you ; dwell and trade ye therein, and get you possessions therein.

11. And Shechem said unto her father and unto her brethren, Let me find grace in your eyes, and what ye shall say unto me I will give.

12. Ask me never so much dowry and gift, and I will give according as ye shall say unto me : but give me the damsel to wife.

Results of Unfaithfulness

13. And the sons of Jacob answered Shechem and Hamor his father deceitfully, and said, because he had defiled Dinah their sister :

14. And they said unto them, We cannot do this thing to give our sister to one that is uncircumcised ; for that *were* a reproach unto us :

15. But in this will we consent unto you : If ye will be as we *be*, that every male of you be circumcised ;

16. Then will we give our daughters unto you, and we will take your daughters to us, and we will dwell with you, and we will become one people.

17. But if ye will not hearken unto us, to be circumcised ; then will we take our daughter, and we will be gone.

18. And their words pleased Hamor, and Shechem Hamor's son.

19. And the young man deferred not to do the thing, because he had delight in Jacob's daughter : and he *was* more honourable than all the house of his father.

20. And Hamor and Shechem his son came unto the gate of their city, and communed with the men of their city, saying,

21. These men *are* peaceable with us ; therefore let them dwell in the land, and trade therein ; for the land, behold, *it is* large enough for them ; let us take their daughters to us for wives, and let us give them our daughters.

22. Only herein will the men consent unto us for to dwell with us, to be one people, if every male among us be circumcised, as they *are* circumcised.

23. *Shall* not their cattle and their substance and every beast of their's *be* our's ? only let us consent unto them, and they will dwell with us.

24. And unto Hamor and unto Shechem his son hearkened all that went out of the gate of his city ; and every male was circumcised, all that went out of the gate of his city.

25. And it came to pass on the third day, when they were sore, that two of the sons of Jacob, Simeon and Levi, Dinah's brethren, took each man his sword, and came upon the city boldly, and slew all the males.

26. And they slew Hamor and Shechem his son with the edge of the sword, and took Dinah out of Shechem's house, and went out.

27. The sons of Jacob came upon the slain, and spoiled the city, because they had defiled their sister.

28. They took their sheep, and their oxen, and their asses, and that which *was* in the city, and that which *was* in the field.

29. And all their wealth, and all their little ones, and their wives took they captive, and spoiled even all that *was* in the house.

Genesis xxv. 11—xxxvi. 8

30. And Jacob said to Simeon and Levi, Ye have troubled me to make me to stink among the inhabitants of the land, among the Canaanites and the Perizzites: and I *being* few in number, they shall gather themselves together against me, and slay me; and I shall be destroyed, I and my house.

31. And they said, Should he deal with our sister as with an harlot?

Gen.
xxxiv.

A CAREFUL comparison of passages shows that Jacob's stay at Succoth and Shechem must have extended over several years. Bethel and his vow (xxviii. 22) were evidently forgotten or ignored. The pastures at Succoth and Shechem were attractive, his possessions had so largely increased that movement was difficult, circumstances were perhaps conceived of as having changed, making the realisation of the vow almost impracticable. And so Jacob settled down to ordinary life, having either put off or else put aside the fulfilment of his promise. He was not prepared for the upheaval that a move to Bethel would involve. Full of resource whenever danger threatened, he seemed to be "settling on the lees," content with his favoured position in Shechem and with his profession of religion as indicated by the altar (xxxiii. 20).

Unwilling to
be Faithful.

'A spiritual experience that is separated from your present by twenty years of active life, by a foreign residence, by marriage, by the growing-up of a family around you, by other and fresher spiritual experiences, is apt to be very indistinctly remembered. The obligations you then felt and owned have been overlaid and buried in the lapse of years. And so it comes that a low

Results of Unfaithfulness

tone is introduced into your life, and your homes Gen. cease to be model homes' (Dods, *Genesis*, p. xxxiv. 313).

And this is the man who has seen the Face of God! This is the man to whom the special Divine revelation of grace had been given! This is the man whom God's goodness and mercy had followed all the days of his life! He it is who is on this low ground of unfaithfulness, of spiritual declension, and who has to suffer for it bitterly. So it is always; spiritual leakage means spiritual loss, a lower tone, a cessation of power, a discontinuance of testimony, and, not least of all, an unrest of soul and untold trouble of heart and life. Let us now observe some of the sad effects of Jacob's unfaithfulness.

I. *The Grave Danger* (cf. xxxiii. 18-20).—It seems clear that the choice of Shechem was largely conditioned by its favourable position for his family and flocks. Jacob pitched his tent 'before the city,' in close proximity to the people and the place, in the neighbourhood of which he could find society and protection, with pasturage for his flocks. The choice of a home or of a school to-day is not seldom regulated by the same considerations. A professing Christian man is retiring from business, and determines to reside in the country. Where shall he go? What are his requirements? Healthy surroundings, of course. But also a neighbourhood where his young people will be able to enjoy the advantages of good society, where they can mix easily and freely on good terms with the 'best

I. The Grave Danger (cf. chap. xxxiii. 18-20).

Genesis xxv. 11—xxxvi. 8

Gen.
xxxiv.

people,' where social intercourse and entertainment abound, and where the family will soon take its place as one of the recognised centres of social influence. All very attractive and delightful; but does it ever occur to the man who is thus choosing his home to inquire as to the spiritual opportunities of the place? What sort of a church has it? Is the Gospel preached there? Is Christ lifted up? Or is it a fashionable church where either formalism or mere intellectualism rules? But, says the man, 'You cannot have everything you want; you must do the best you can with your opportunities, and hope for the best.' Be it so; and spiritual trouble will be the result. Unless a family is deliberately going into a spiritually destitute neighbourhood to witness for Christ and to win people to Him (in which case they will not be allowed many social advantages by their neighbours!), the first and supreme factor of choice of a new home should be, 'What will it do for our spiritual life?'

God first in
Home and
Social Life.

Or it may be that parents have to choose a school for their boys and girls. They are able to send them to the very best known of public schools, and they quite naturally desire for their children the best opportunities, educational and social. But there are well-grounded reports that these particular schools, though socially advantageous, are morally disadvantageous, and attended with risk. What will the father and mother do? Will they take the risk? Or will they definitely make themselves familiar with the religious life of the

Results of Unfaithfulness

school before sending their boy? Or will they not rather send him to a less known school, where all is well religiously, and sacrifice the social advantages of the other school for the sake of moral and spiritual safety? On the answer to these questions much will turn. Jacob chose to live near Shechem, with all the risks involved thereby, and no one ever follows his example without suffering quite as definitely, in some way or other.

II. *The Great Disaster* (vers. 1, 2).—The inevitable result of living near Shechem was soon seen. Dinah, the only daughter of Jacob (xxx. 21), ‘went out to see the daughters of the land.’ It was a perfectly natural thing for a young, inexperienced girl to do. The thought of visiting ‘the daughters of the land,’ was at once novel and interesting. We wonder, however, what Jacob and Leah were doing to allow it. Why did they not warn Dinah of the danger, and prevent her going? Was this inaction due to their lowered moral tone? Did they argue that there was ‘no danger’ and that ‘we must not be too particular or strait-laced’? In any case, she was allowed to go, with the result that is well known. The sin of Shechem was, of course, in every way inexcusable, for it was against the youth of the girl, as well as against all known laws of hospitality. And yet in view of the fact that he and his people were people of the land, and not followers of the one true God, it would not be regarded by him and his in the same light of heinousness as it was regarded from Jacob’s side.

Gen.
xxxiv.

II. The
Great
Disaster
(vers. 1, 2).

Genesis xxv. 11—xxxvi. 8

Gen.
xxxiv.

It is very striking that the word rendered 'defiled' (vers. 5, 13, 27) means 'desecrated,' and is used later to describe the defilement or desecration of the Temple (Ps. lxxix.). 'The dishonour of womanhood and the desecration of the Holy of Holies are regarded with the same feelings and described by the same word' (Strachan, *Hebrew Ideals, in loc.*). Thus does the Book of God regard personal purity, and denote and denounce the sin that dishonours it. But while we fail not to point out the sin of Shechem, we may not forget the weakness and unfaithfulness of Jacob that made possible his daughter's shame.

III. The
Unexpected
Project
(vers. 3-12).

III. *The Unexpected Project* (vers. 3-12).—Shechem proceeded to make the only possible reparation. He had evidently become genuinely attached to Dinah and wished to make her his wife. He thereupon requested his father to take the necessary steps to this end according to the custom which made it the parents' business to obtain wives for their sons (Gen. xxiv. 4; Judges xiv. 2).

Jacob soon heard the terrible news of his daughter's fall, and as his sons were not then at home he 'held his peace.' We wonder why? Was it because of sorrow and shame as he thought of his daughter and of the circumstances that gave opportunity for it? Was conscience stirring within him, reminding him of Bethel? Or was it a case of real indecision, not knowing what to do, and therefore leaving the matter to be settled by Dinah's brothers? It is true that brothers seem

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to have had a great deal to say concerning their sister's life (xxiv. 50 *f.*), but at the same time Jacob's silence and inaction, as head of the household, are somewhat difficult to understand. The 'silence' does not seem to have been in connection with the proposed marriage, but with reference to the sin and shame. Gen. xxxiv.

At length the brothers heard of it, and at the same time came Hamor's request on behalf of his son. The proposal for marriage was suggested as an opportunity for the beginning of a general amalgamation of the two families and peoples (vers. 9, 10). Shechem was also prepared to give whatever 'dowry' they asked, the 'dowry' being not a gift to the bride, in the modern sense, but a price paid to the parents for their daughter (Exod. xxii. 16 *f.*; 1 Sam. xviii. 25).

Value of
Association
with the
Godly.

These proposals are significant on several grounds. They show clearly the value set by the Canaanites on union with Jacob's family. It was not the first, and it has not been the last occasion when people of the world have thought it advantageous to be united with the people of God. Godliness, even of the kind then shown by Jacob, has promise of attractiveness and value for men of the world. Then, too, we cannot help noticing the true nobility of character shown by Shechem. In spite of his sin, or at least after it, he stands out well by comparison with the rest of the actors here mentioned. And it is a striking testimony to the candour of the Book that it depicts both this Canaanitish prince and the sons

Genesis xxv. 11—xxxvi. 8

Gen.
xxxiv.

of Jacob so faithfully. The frankness of the Bible is not the least proof of its truthfulness and authenticity.

IV. The
Unworthy
Pretext
(vers. 13-17).

IV. *The Unworthy Pretext* (vers. 13-17).—The request and proposals of Hamor and Shechem were regarded by Dinah's brothers as impossible unless one particular condition were fulfilled. They took up the ground that it would be intolerable to allow an uncircumcised man to become the husband of one who was within the covenant of God, but they were quite ready to agree to the marriage if the Canaanites would agree to all their males receiving the sign of the covenant. Not only so, they would be prepared to enter into other marriages and to become 'one people' with the Canaanites.

Motive
makes the
Man.

All this sounded quite fair and straightforward. It was taking up a perfectly intelligible attitude, and one that, if based on right motives, would have been not only necessary and justifiable, but would have brought about the best possible ending to the trouble concerning their sister. But it was the absence of the right motive that condemned their proposal. They had no idea of these men entering the covenant on religious grounds. They were proposing to use the sign of the religious covenant as the means of a purely human agreement. Circumcision without faith in the covenant God could not be anything but carnal and earthly. And, worse still, they were about to employ the solemn seal of the Divine covenant for the purpose of wreaking their vengeance on these unsuspecting

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men. Their suggestion was therefore nothing more than a pretext to cover treachery. There was the appearance of piety with the reality of intended murder. Could anything be more truly terrible? What a light it sheds on the state of Jacob's home life! And why was Jacob silent during all these proposals? True, he could not know the contemplated treachery, but his entire silence is remarkable. Had he no part or power in the matter of his daughter's life? Or was he weak and irresolute, conscious of his own unfaithfulness.

V. *The Trustful Acceptance* (vers. 18-24).—The requirements of Dinah's brethren were at once welcomed by Hamor and Shechem. The latter was prepared for instant acquiescence, so genuine was his love for Dinah. The proposals were also set before the men of the city, and their acceptance urged by Hamor and Shechem. They pointed out the peaceable character of Jacob and his family, and the size of the land as sufficient for them all to live in and trade together. It was also shown that amalgamation would prove advantageous in the acquisition of fresh possessions, since all would be as one in the event of marriages between the two races. The proposals thus ably urged were accepted, and the men of Shechem submitted to the condition laid down by Jacob's sons. And apart from any consideration of personal advantage urged as one of the reasons for acquiescence, it is impossible not to see the peaceable and trustful attitude of the Canaanites in the face of Jacob

Gen.
xxxiv.

V. The
Trustful
Acceptance
(vers. 18-24).

Genesis xxv. 11—xxxvi. 8

Gen.
xxxiv.

and his sons. The 'heathen' show up well by contrast with those who were professedly the people of God.

VI. The
Traacherous
Action
(vers. 25-29).

VI. *The Treacherous Action* (vers. 25-29).—Very soon the true object of Dinah's brethren was revealed. Their apparently religious requirement was seen to be the cloak of vengeance, and at a convenient moment the trusting Canaanites were massacred, including Hamor and Shechem. Then, after taking their sister home, they returned to complete their fell task by sacking the city and capturing all the women, children, and flocks they could find. Thus they avenged sin by greater sin. It is sometimes said that this was all the result of 'religious fanaticism,' and that in it we have the first example of that Jewish fanaticism for religion which caused the Jews so much trouble (Dods, p. 314). It does not, however, appear clear that there was anything of religion in it, but only sheer cruelty and vindictiveness exercised under the guise of a religious rite. The men who could plot and wreak such a vengeance did not possess one grain of religion, even of a fanatical kind. The story is one of unrelieved savagery. If only they had been actuated by true motives their sister's shame would have been covered, so far as it could be, by subsequent marriage; but as it was, she was robbed of that refuge, and had to live her life and end her days under the cloud of disgrace, due first to herself and then to her brothers' vengeance. And all this in the family of the chosen patriarch! Could anything be sadder or more disappointing? Could

Vindictive-
ness cloaked
by Religion.

Results of Unfaithfulness

Divine grace overrule these awful troubles? **Gen.**
Yes, it could and did, though they still stand **xxxiv.**
recorded in all their hideousness, 'written for our
learning.'

VII. *The Surprising Rebuke* (ver. 30).—At last **VII. The**
Jacob speaks, having 'held his peace' far too long. **Surprising**
He rebuked his sons for their action, but the **Rebuke**
character of the rebuke is very noticeable. Jacob- **(ver. 30).**
like, the patriarch looks at the matter solely from
his own point of view. 'Ye have troubled *me* to
make *me* to stink among the inhabitants . . .
and *I* being few . . . they shall gather . . .
against *me* and *I* shall be destroyed, *I* and *my*
house.' Could anything be feebler or more un-
worthy? No blame for the sin committed, only for
the danger involved. He was afraid for his life,
his home, the land he paid for, the possessions he
enjoyed. Trouble comes through unfaithfulness,
and then circumstances are blamed. Children bring
trouble on parents, and perhaps the fault is originally
and largely the parents' own.

Weakness and timidity are here as plainly **Weakness**
marked as ever, showing clearly the low tone of **and**
the man through long-continued unfaithfulness **Timidity.**
to God. His apprehensiveness of danger shows
that there was no spiritual satisfaction or assurance
of safety. He had quite forgotten the Divine
promise of protection (xxviii. 14 *f.*). People who
live on the borderland between Church and world
are like those who lived in the old days on the
borders between England and Scotland—they are
never safe.

Genesis xxv. 11—xxxvi. 8

Gen.
xxxiv.
VIII. The
Significant
Rejoinder
(ver. 31).

VIII. *The Significant Rejoinder* (ver. 31).—The sons have the last word, and justify their action in words that partake of the nature of a *suppressio veri*, and therefore of a *suggestio falsi*. They omit all reference to the action of Shechem by which he would have done reparation and prevented Dinah from living all her days under the shadow of her sin. Their father allows them to have the last word, not that he admits the truth of their position, but perhaps because argument with such men would be useless, and possibly because he is conscious that his own choice of Shechem for a home was contributory in great measure to what had happened. When, however, the end of his life comes, the old man shows that he had not forgotten their action (xlix. 6, 7), for he stamps it in its true colours as disreputable and wrong in the sight of God.

Suggestions
for Medita-
tion.

The one lesson that stands out from all the rest is that which is associated with the life and character of Jacob at this time. It is the fact and danger of worldliness.

Peril of
Worldliness.

1. *Worldliness is a real spiritual peril.*—It is doubtless difficult to define 'worldliness,' and on this account it is easy to ridicule the idea and put it down to narrowness, straitlacedness, and censoriousness. But in all ages, under a variety of phases, the fact and force of 'worldliness' have been felt and acknowledged by all spiritually-minded people. Does not Church history show a difference in the spiritual life of the Church in the second and third as compared with the fourth and fifth centuries?

Results of Unfaithfulness

What was the explanation? Three words sum it up: **Gen. xxxiv.** Constantine, patronage, worldliness. We see it again and again in churches and congregations where sensational or other unworthy methods have been used to attract people, with the result that the ministry is robbed of power, Prayer Meetings and Bible classes yield to concerts, 'the hungry sheep look up and are not fed,' and souls are not saved. We see it also in the individual lives of those who once 'ran well,' but who have yielded to pressure and have lowered the standard of holiness for fear of being thought too 'narrow' or 'too particular.' Yes, worldliness *is* hard to define, but it is very easy to feel, to detect, and to describe. It is an atmosphere, enervating, lowering, poisoning, deadening; and whenever individuals and churches are under its sway, the result, however long delayed, is as inevitable as it is disastrous to the soul and dishonouring to God.

2. *Worldliness prevents spiritual blessing.*—Not only did Jacob's worldliness lead to danger and disaster to himself and his household, it necessarily hindered him at the same time from bearing witness to God. 'The Canaanite was then in the land,' and, like Lot before him, there was no real testimony, because there was no real difference between him and them. What cared they for his altar, so long as he lived with them and did as they did? What good could the altar do in the face of his life day by day as one of themselves? So it is always. Worldliness lowers tone and prevents testimony. The banner is not displayed, because the life is not

**Worldliness
prevents
Blessing.**

Genesis xxv. 11—xxxvi. 8

Gen.
xxxiv.

true. The standard is not maintained, and blessing is not obtained. There never has been a case where the adoption of worldly methods has justified itself by spiritual blessing. In the Middle Ages the Pope boasted to Thomas Aquinas, as he showed that great scholar the treasures of the Vatican, 'The Church cannot now say, "Silver and gold have I none."' 'True,' said Thomas, 'and neither can it say, "In the Name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk."'

Safeguard
against
Worldliness.

3. *Worldliness can only be prevented by separation.*—The Master in His High Priestly prayer (John xvii.) gives us the true (sevenfold) attitude of the believer and the Church to the world, and thereby reveals the safeguard against this insidious peril. We are given to Christ 'out of the world' (ver. 6); we are 'in the world' (ver. 11); we are 'hated by the world' (ver. 14); we are 'not of the world' (ver. 14); we are 'not to be taken out of the world,' but 'kept from' its evil (ver. 15), and we are 'sent into the world' (ver. 18) to witness to it as our Master did, 'that the world may know' (ver. 23) who and what He is. All this can only be realised through true spiritual separation, and, however difficult it may be to define exactly the limits of separation, the fact and necessity of it are undoubted. The principles, ideals, and methods of Christianity cannot possibly be mixed with those of the world without contamination; and if only we abide in Christ and continue in His love we shall live in an atmosphere of purity and power which will be our constant safeguard and our

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sufficient warning. One thing is perfectly clear: **Gen.** no one can read and study the teaching of the New **xxxiv.** Testament as to 'the world' without becoming conscious at once of the danger and of the safeguard, of the enemy and of the protection, of the warfare and of the secret of perpetual victory.

XIV

BETHEL AT LAST

GEN. xxxv. 1-15

1. And God said unto Jacob, Arise, go up to Beth-el, and dwell there : and make there an altar unto God, that appeared unto thee when thou fleddest from the face of Esau thy brother.

2. Then Jacob said unto his household, and to all that *were* with him, Put away the strange gods that *are* among you, and be clean, and change your garments :

3. And let us arise, and go up to Beth-el : and I will make there an altar unto God, Who answered me in the day of my distress, and was with me in the way which I went.

4. And they gave unto Jacob all the strange gods which *were* in their hand, and *all their* earrings which *were* in their ears ; and Jacob hid them under the oak which *was* by Shechem.

5. And they journeyed : and the terror of God was upon the cities that *were* round about them, and they did not pursue after the sons of Jacob.

6. So Jacob came to Luz, which *is* in the land of Canaan, that *is*, Beth-el, he and all the people that *were* with him.

7. And he built there an altar, and called the place El-beth-el : because there God appeared unto him, when he fled from the face of his brother.

8. But Deborah Rebekah's nurse died, and she was buried beneath Beth-el under an oak : and the name of it was called Allon-bachuth.

9. And God appeared unto Jacob again, when he came out of Padan-aram, and blessed him.

10. And God said unto him, Thy name *is* Jacob : thy name shall not be called any more Jacob, but Israel shall be thy name : and he called his name Israel.

11. And God said unto him, I *am* God Almighty : be fruitful and multiply ; a nation and a company of nations shall be of thee, and kings shall come out of thy loins :

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12. And the land which I gave Abraham and Isaac, to thee I will give it, and to thy seed after thee will I give the land.

13. And God went up from him in the place where He talked with him.

14. And Jacob set up a pillar in the place where He talked with him, *even* a pillar of stone : and he poured a drink offering thereon, and he poured oil thereon.

15. And Jacob called the name of the place where God spake with him, Beth-el.

A CRISIS had arrived in the life of Jacob. His stay at Shechem was a time of spiritual unfaithfulness and therefore of spiritual unfitness, but the time had come when through a variety of circumstances he was to be brought back to God. 'The thirty-fourth chapter of Genesis is God-less; 'the thirty-fifth is full of God. The former describes the Shechem life of the Hebrews; the latter, their Bethel life. The contrast between a believer's and an unbeliever's life is scarcely more marked than the contrast between a half-hearted and a whole-hearted believer's life' (Strachan, *Hebrew Ideals, in loc.*). When a believer is out of spiritual condition and is not living in spiritual touch with God, God does not leave him alone. In one way or another he is stirred up, troubled, and dealt with in discipline until he returns to his true life of fellowship. This, as we shall now see, was Jacob's experience.

I. *The Urgent Call* (ver. 1).—'And God said unto Jacob, Arise, go up to Bethel, and dwell there : and make there an altar unto God, that appeared unto thee when thou fleddest from the face of Esau thy brother.' Bethel was only thirty miles away from Shechem, and yet it was quite ten years since Jacob's return into Canaan. And it was over thirty

Gen.
xxxv.
1-15.

I. The
Urgent Call
(ver. 1).

Genesis xxv. 11—xxxvi. 8

Gen.
xxxv.
1-15.

years since he had made his vow to return to Bethel and acknowledge God's hand if he were brought back in peace. The conditions had been exactly and completely fulfilled years ago, but the vow was yet unpaid. Now at length came the Divine call, for God could not let His servant rest in disobedience. He must bring him back to the point and place of faithful obedience. The only possible means of restoration after backsliding is the old familiar gateway of repentance and faith.

Reasons for
returning
to Bethel.

There was also a personal as well as a Divine reason for returning to Bethel. It was impossible for Jacob to detect the true state of affairs as long as he remained in Shechem. The atmosphere was impregnated with worldliness, and while he continued there he could not detect aright his unspiritual and sinful condition. We might have supposed that it was quite unnecessary for God to command him to go to Bethel 'and make there an altar,' for was there not already an altar in Shechem (xxxiii. 20)? But, as we have before seen, that altar had long lost all spiritual power for Jacob and his family, since their daily living was for the most part a direct contradiction of its testimony. If that altar had been of any real service we should not have had the awful story of the savagery of Jacob's sons (xxxiv.). It is scarcely too much to say that children brought up in an atmosphere of worldliness are the very hardest to impress with the realities of spiritual religion, even though they may attend a place of worship week by week. The life of worldliness during six days is far too

Bethel at Last

powerful for anything that happens on the seventh day to counteract it. Gen. xxxv. I-15.

There was also yet another and social reason for Jacob's removal. He and his family were henceforward in constant dread of trouble and danger from their Canaanitish neighbours. Up to that time everything seemed to be going quietly, and, in their judgment, satisfactorily; but now it was seen to be absolutely essential to make a move, for it would be no longer safe to abide near Shechem in view of the almost assured certainty of blood revenge on the part of the Shechemites.

These three reasons—the Divine, the spiritual, and the social—combined to lead Jacob out of Shechem. It was doubtless hard, and certainly it must have been costly and troublesome, but it had to be done.

II. *The Special Preparation* (vers. 2-4).—At length Jacob was thoroughly roused, and promptly set about obeying the Divine and urgent command. II. The Special Preparation (vers. 2-4). The first thing to be done was to make due spiritual preparation, and he called upon his household to put away the strange gods that were among them, to purify themselves, and to change their garments. What a revelation this is! It shows at once the true state of affairs. There had been spiritual declension, and Jacob clearly knew of, and had evidently connived at, the presence of idols and idolatrous practices in his household. His love to Rachel had led him to tolerate what he knew perfectly well was contrary to the mind and will of God. It is sad to realise that all this was true

Genesis xxv. 11—xxxvi. 8

Gen.
xxxv.
1-15.

of the man who had been brought face to face with God at Peniel. It shows again the awful possibility of spiritual declension, even after the most exalted fellowship with God.

It is very striking to read of Jacob's influence at this time. His appeal to his household at once elicited a whole-hearted response. They saw that he was in earnest, and they gave to him 'all the strange gods which were in their hand, and all the earrings which were in their ears.' The household gods and amulets were all freely surrendered, and Jacob did the very best possible thing with them; he 'hid them under the oak which was at Shechem.' Shechem had been the place of spiritual trouble, and these causes of spiritual trouble were appropriately left behind there. It would not have been safe to have allowed them to remain a moment longer in the household. Surrender is the supreme secret and condition of spiritual blessing. As long as there is any mental or moral reservation, there cannot be any real satisfaction in the soul, strength in the character, or service for God. It is noteworthy that there are certain things in connection with the spiritual life that must be entirely given up and destroyed, for it is impossible to sanctify or consecrate them. They must be buried and left behind, for they cannot possibly be devoted to the service of God. It is this that gives point to our Lord's well-known words, 'If thy right hand offend thee, cut it off.' There are things that have to be cut off and cannot be consecrated. Books have to be burned (Acts xix. 19). Evil habits have to be

Surrender
must precede
Blessing.

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broken. Sin must be put away. There are things that are beyond all reclamation. Gen.
xxxv.
1-15.

‘The dearest idol I have known,
Whate’er that idol be;
Help me to tear it from thy throne,
And worship only Thee.’

It is impossible to avoid noticing the astonishing alacrity and remarkable power of Jacob at this juncture, especially in contrast with his weakness and powerlessness as recorded in the former chapter. He asserted his authority, and his position was accepted without any question even by his strong-willed and savage sons. Even they could not help being impressed with the fact that their father was now on the right ground before God, and was showing the truth of the wonderful revelation at Peniel that when a man has power with God he soon has power with man.

III. *The Remarkable Journey* (ver. 5).—‘And they journeyed: and the terror of God was upon the cities that were round about them, and they did not pursue after the sons of Jacob.’ This is a wonderful verse, and is another testimony to the astonishing power of a life that is right with God. ‘When a man’s ways please the Lord He maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him.’ So deeply impressed were the Canaanites round about them that there was no attempt whatever to hinder or injure the departing family. The supernatural fear that came upon them prevented them from taking revenge on the sons of Jacob. We see again the absolute necessity of separation from evil

III. The
Remarkable
Journey
(ver. 5).

Genesis xxv. 11—xxxvi. 8

Gen.
xxxv.
1-15.

if there is to be true testimony for God. As long as they were at Shechem, there was no real witness; but now that they were separating themselves from it the people were impressed with the supernatural character of the travellers, and 'the terror of God' was manifestly experienced by the Canaanites. What confidence this must have put into the heart of Jacob as he received the assurance that he was now at length in the pathway of God's will! 'If our hearts condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God.'

IV. The
Noteworthy
Arrival
(ver. 6).

IV. *The Noteworthy Arrival* (ver. 6). 'So Jacob came to Luz, which is in the land of Canaan, that is, Bethel, he and all the people that were with him.' Jacob's sincerity is very evident in the way in which he accomplished his journey. There was no halting, and no lagging behind, for everything that belonged to him arrived there with him; 'he and all the people that were with him.' He had become thoroughly roused to his true position and duty, and at last after thirty years' absence he was once more back at the place of the Divine vision (xxviii.). What memories the place must have called up as he reviewed the past with all his varied experiences! And how thankful he must have felt to be at length in the pathway of God's will, and assured of peace, rest, protection, and blessing!

V. The
Prompt
Obedience
(vers. 7, 8).

V. *The Prompt Obedience* (vers. 7, 8).—'And he built there an altar, and called the place El-bethel: because there God appeared unto him when he fled from the face of his brother.' This was the

Bethel at Last

way in which Jacob fulfilled his vow (xxviii. 22). **Gen. xxxv. 1-15.**
The name of the altar is worthy of special note in comparison with that of the altar at Shechem (xxxiii. 20). In Shechem the altar bore witness to God's relation to Jacob himself, 'God the God of Israel'; but at Bethel self is entirely lost and God alone is mentioned, 'the God of Bethel,' or 'God of the House of God.' This was a higher and nobler thought. Instead of thinking of God in relation to himself, Jacob thought of God alone. His spiritual condition being higher, his conception of God was higher also. The constant recurrence of this name of God, 'El,' in Jacob's history is very interesting. It will be remembered that Abraham built an altar near Shechem (xii. 7), though his altar was not built unto El, but unto Jehovah. In the case of Jacob there had been a special revelation of God under this name of El, both at Bethel and at Peniel, which was incorporated in the new name of Israel; and now once more at Bethel a new emphasis is placed on this name after all the years that had elapsed since Peniel. **The Altar at Bethel.**

The reason assigned for the erection of this altar is very striking: 'Because there God appeared unto him when he had fled from the face of his brother.' Jacob was conscious of that far-off day in the past, of which he speaks on another occasion as 'the day of his distress.' It is always well for us to go back to earlier experiences and refresh our memories by the recollection of some former blessing from God. This is probably one reason why thanksgiving is so strongly emphasised in the New Testament. 'Lest

Genesis xxv. 11—xxxvi. 8

Gen.
xxxv.
1-15.

we forget.' The remembrance of past mercies in the times of trouble, distress, and danger is one of the greatest encouragements to renewed confidence in our ever-faithful, unchanging covenant God.

It was just at this time that a very precious link with the past was broken. Deborah, Rebekah's nurse, died while Jacob was at Bethel, and was buried under an oak-tree there. She very appropriately united together the two visits to Bethel, the day when he started out from home and the day of his return.

VI. The New
Revelation
(vers. 9-13).

VI. *The New Revelation* (vers. 9-13).—'God appeared unto Jacob again . . . and blessed him.' How striking is this word 'again'! Reconciliation had been accomplished. There was now no cloud between the patriarch and his God, and the Divine appearance which was not permitted him in Shechem comes with its blessed assurance of renewed favour and sunshine after rain. This was not only a Divine command (ver. 1), but a Divine appearance, a manifestation visible as well as audible (ver. 13). The revelation of Peniel was thereupon renewed and the name Israel once more given. Not only so, but a fresh revelation of God was also granted to Jacob: 'I am God Almighty.' The same name of El-Shaddai which had been revealed to his grandfather (xvii. 1) was now confirmed to him as the assurance and guarantee of his fruitfulness and the marvellous increase of his family and household. It is surely not without point that from this time forward Jacob's household increased in a very remarkable way, until at

Bethel at Last

length, as we know, the family became a nation in Egypt (Exod. i.) Gen.
xxxv.

This Divine revelation not only renewed the experience of Peniel (ver. 10), and encouraged him with assurance of power (ver. 11); it also confirmed what had already been said by God at Bethel (xxviii. 13). It linked Jacob with his father and grandfather in the Divine promise of the land to him and to his seed. Truly the sun had burst forth in glorious splendour as the wandering patriarch was once more in full fellowship with God. I-15.

VII. *The Grateful Memorial* (vers. 14, 15).—VII. *The Grateful Memorial* (vers. 14, 15).
Once again Jacob sets his seal to the Divine revelation and raises his 'Ebenezer.' Not only did he set up a pillar of stone, but he poured a libation thereon—the first instance of drink offerings in Scripture—and then anointed it with oil. He, too, has his work of confirmation, as God had His, and once more he called the name of the place Bethel. Repentance and faith always rejoice to set up their memorials, to which they can recur in gratitude and thankfulness for all the marvellous mercies of God.

1. *God's unutterable love.*—All the time that Jacob was living away from true fellowship with God he was not forgotten. God seemed to have left him entirely alone, but in reality was working all the time in various ways to bring him back again. So is it always. While we are backsliding we are apparently left to ourselves, but it is not Suggestions
for Medita-
tion.

Genesis xxv. 11—xxxvi. 8

Gen.
xxxv.
1-15.

really so. God will not forsake His children. They may sin and wander, but He watches, waits, and endeavours to win them back. The old lessons have to be learned again and again in various forms until His purpose is accomplished. God bears with us in tender love and over-ruling mercy, and gives us no real rest until He brings us back to a right relation to Himself. Jacob may go to Succoth and stay at Shechem, but circumstances will arise to stir up his nest till at length he is impelled—nay, almost compelled—to go to Bethel. How marvellous is the long-suffering, tender love of our God! He knows what is the right and best thing for His children. ‘Who teacheth like Him?’

God's
Absolute
Justice.

2. *God's absolute justice.*—In bringing Jacob back to Himself God made no allowance for His servant's sin. If it be possible, God is stricter with His own children than with others. Jacob had made a solemn vow and promise that if God would be with him and bring him back to his father's home in peace, God should be his God and Bethel a Divine memorial. All, and very much more besides, had been completely fulfilled by God, and yet Jacob's part had not been performed. It was necessary therefore first and foremost that the wrong should be righted. This is always God's method of recall after spiritual declension. ‘Repent and do the first works’ (Rev. ii. 5). When the children of Israel arrived in Canaan the very first things required of them were the renewal of the covenants of circumcision and of the Passover, in order that the people might be on the true footing

Bethel at Last

of relationship and fellowship with God. And so **Gen.**
it must ever be. Whatever can be put right must **xxxv.**
be put right, if our fellowship with God is to be **I-15.**
renewed ; and as long as we are unwilling to set
right that which is wrong God will have a
controversy with us, and there cannot be any
spiritual rest or satisfaction of soul.

3. *God's restoring grace.*—It is truly marvellous **God's**
what the grace of God can do even for a repentant **Restoring**
believer and a returned backslider. It is perfectly **Grace.**
true that the failure and backsliding of His children
prevent them from ever being exactly what they
would have been apart from these faults. At the
same time it is equally true that God's overruling
grace can work wonders. We think of Manasseh
after his idolatry, of David after his sin, of Peter
after his fall ; and while we dare not say, as some
would teach, 'We may be all we might have been,'
we *can* say with absolute certainty that 'We may
be something that we should never otherwise have
been,' because of the new elements that have
entered into our life through the bitter experiences
of backsliding. These things never excuse or even
palliate our fall, and the repentant and restored
believer will always be severe against himself by
reason of his former backsliding ; but we can say,
and dare to say, that Divine grace takes up the
threads even of our darkest experiences and weaves
them into the pattern of our life from that time
forward. Nature knows no forgiveness and no
restoration, but grace is the mighty miracle of the
universe ; and if only we yield ourselves wholly and

Genesis xxv. 11—xxxvi. 8

Gen.
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1-15.

utterly to the hand of God, our lives, whatever the past may have been, shall be monuments, miracles, marvels of the grace of God.

'He came to my desk with a quivering lip—
The lesson was done.

"Dear teacher, I want a new leaf," he said—
"I have spoiled this one."

In place of the leaf so stained and blotted
I gave him a new one all unspotted.
And into his sad eyes smiled—
"*Do better now, my child.*"

'I went to the Throne with a quivering soul—
The old year was done.

"Dear Father, hast thou a new leaf for me?
I have spoiled this one."

He took the old leaf, stained and blotted,
And gave me a new one all unspotted,
And into my sad heart smiled—
"*Do better now, my child.*"

XV

THE SCHOOL OF SORROW

GEN. xxxv. 8, 16-29

8. But Deborah Rebekah's nurse died, and she was buried beneath Bethel under an oak : and the name of it was called Allon-bachuth.

16. And they journeyed from Bethel ; and there was but a little way to come to Ephrath : and Rachel travailed, and she had hard labour.

17. And it came to pass, when she was in hard labour, that the midwife said unto her, Fear not ; thou shalt have this son also.

18. And it came to pass, as her soul was in departing, (for she died), that she called his name Benoni : but his father called him Benjamin.

19. And Rachel died, and was buried in the way to Ephrath, which is Bethlehem.

20. And Jacob set a pillar upon her grave : that is the pillar of Rachel's grave unto this day.

21. And Israel journeyed, and spread his tent beyond the tower of Edar.

22. And it came to pass, when Israel dwelt in that land, that Reuben went and lay with Bilhah his father's concubine : and Israel heard it. Now the sons of Jacob were twelve :

23. The sons of Leah ; Reuben, Jacob's firstborn, and Simeon, and Levi, and Judah, and Issachar, and Zebulun :

24. The sons of Rachel ; Joseph, and Benjamin :

25. And the sons of Bilhah, Rachel's handmaid ; Dan, and Naphtali :

26. And the sons of Zilpah, Leah's handmaid : Gad, and Asher : these *are* the sons of Jacob, which were born to him in Padan-aram.

27. And Jacob came unto Isaac his father unto Mamre, unto the city of Arbah, which is Hebron, where Abraham and Isaac sojourned.

Genesis xxv. 11—xxxvi. 8

28. And the days of Isaac were an hundred and fourscore years.

29. And Isaac gave up the ghost, and died, and was gathered unto his people, *being* old and full of days : and his sons Esau and Jacob buried him.

Gen.
xxxv. 8,
16-29.

God has many ways of making permanent in our lives the lessons of His providence and grace, and one of these is the discipline of sorrow. 'Sweet are the uses of adversity,' as we are now to see in the unfolding of the story of Jacob. There is nothing in its way more striking than the fact that from the time Jacob fulfilled his vow in Bethel to the day that he learnt of Joseph's preservation in Egypt he was scarcely ever out of 'the furnace of affliction.' Some of the earliest of these experiences will now come before us.

I. The Death
of an Old
Servant
(ver. 8).

I. *The Death of an Old Servant* (ver. 8).—No sooner had Jacob reached Bethel than Deborah, the aged nurse of his mother Rebekah, died. First referred to in connection with Rebekah's coming to be the wife of Isaac (xxiv. 59), she is here mentioned again very many years after. How, why, and when she became associated with Jacob's household we know not, for there is no record. It is probable that she joined him in Mesopotamia on the death of his mother. She was a very interesting link with the past, recalling his mother and his own earliest days in the old home. What many a man owes to a faithful servant! How fine are the obituary notices from time to time of 'So-and-so, for many years the faithful servant and friend of —'! Now the link is broken, and Jacob has one connection less with the days of his youth.

The School of Sorrow

As time goes on, and friend after friend passes upward, we find ourselves more and more severed from the past and more and more united with the future. It is in such ways that we are led to think of the future, and to fix our hope on things to come. 'But Deborah died.' That is, notwithstanding the fact that Jacob was now at Bethel and in fellowship with God. Faithfulness to God does not exempt us from sorrow.

II. *The Death of a Beloved Wife* (vers. 16-20).—
Residence at Bethel (ver. 1) was, it would seem, completed with the fulfilment of his vow, and Jacob was apparently free to move southward towards Mamre, the home of his father. He and his household had not gone very far when another great sorrow came upon him, the deepest of his life. He lost his beloved wife Rachel, who died in giving birth to her second son. In her pain and anguish she was cheered by the encouraging news of the birth of another son, but the end of her earthly life was at hand. Just as she was dying she called the newly-born child Benoni ('son of my pain'), in token of the gain of a son even through sorrow. But her husband, to cheer her and himself to the end, would not allow so ill-omened a name to remain, and changed it to Benjamin ('son of the right hand'), indicative of his faith in the blessing and prosperity that should accrue from his birth. Thus we have the first record of death at child-birth, and the entire narrative is full of simple pathos and exquisite beauty. Rachel's life had had its share of sorrow, and the end itself was in no way different.

Gen. xxxv. 8,
16-29.

II. The
Death of a
Beloved
Wife (vers.
16-20).

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Gen.
xxxv. 8,
16-29.

Robbed at the outset of the entire love of one whose wife she was expecting to be, she found herself the victim of jealousy in that unhappy home at Haran. Nor did she seem to have, at any rate until late in life, the full consolation of the worship of the true God, for she was given to superstition (xxx. 14), and the worship of false gods (xxxi. 19). It is probable that these influences were not wholly extirpated until the removal to Bethel (xxxv. 2, 4). She had hoped for another son in addition to Joseph (xxx. 24), but her unwise and passionate prayer of years ago (xxx. 1) now received a very unexpected answer. She had indeed a son given to her, and died at the time of the gift.

Once again Jacob set up a pillar, this time in memory of his love and sorrow (verse 20), just as he had at Bethel in memory of the Divine love and grace to him (verse 14). His love for Rachel was remarkable in its depth and constancy. Even long years after her death the memory was keen and poignant (xlviii. 7). It is one of the most striking features of Jacob's character that he could love so devotedly and tenaciously. Such a strong nature as this was capable of great things, whatever sins and errors were on the surface.

III. The Sin
of a First-
born Son
(vers. 21, 22).

III. *The Sin of a Firstborn Son* (vers. 21, 22).—From the sad scene of his great bereavement Israel journeyed on towards Mamre. The word 'Israel' is noteworthy here. It is the first occurrence of the new name as applied to Jacob after the confirmation of it at Bethel. Like the usage in Genesis of Jehovah and Elohim, which are in-

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variably employed with discrimination, the terms **Gen.** Israel and Jacob are always to be carefully observed, **xxxv. 8,** for not seldom it is possible to see a real meaning **16-29.** in the particular one used. Here it seems to suggest that he journeyed in the strength of that power with God which was his heritage as the Prince of God, and by means of which he faced and bore his sorrow. He spread his tent between Bethlehem and Mamre, 'beyond the tower of Edar,' the tower being one of those frequently found as at once the centre and safeguard of flocks and herds (2 Kings xvii. 9).

Another and terrible sorrow now falls on the patriarch in the awful sin of his eldest son Reuben. **Sorrow caused by Sin.** By this fearful sin (Lev. xviii. 8; 1 Cor. v. 1) he lost the birthright (Gen. xlix. 4) and incurred endless shame and infamy. Thus by a curious coincidence, and perhaps with some inner meaning, the record of the birth of Jacob's youngest son is brought into close association with the sin of the eldest son. In the light of the subsequent history of the tribes of Benjamin and Reuben we can see here another illustration of the great principle that 'the last shall be first and the first last.' Rachel's sons come to the front in due course. At first she, the beloved and rightful wife, was without children (xxx. 1), and every advantage seemed to be with Leah, who had been deceitfully pressed upon Jacob. But at length Rachel's turn came, and not only did she have two sons, but these sons came to their own in God's good time. Joseph in his two sons, and Benjamin also, had tribal territories allotted

Genesis xxv. 11—xxxvi. 8

Gen.
xxxv. 8,
16-29.

to them, and Ephraim was leader of Israel for centuries, while Reuben lost the birthright which would have been his as firstborn son. No one can seriously question the fact of a Divine Providence in human life, a Providence that sees justice done and wrongs righted, even though the progress may be slow and the time long.

How to meet
Sorrow.

We can easily imagine the anguish and shame that filled the patriarch's heart as he became aware of this sin of Reuben. Coming so soon after his great sorrow, it must have caused tenfold grief to a heart already wrung with pain. And yet the record simply but significantly states, 'and Israel heard it.' Mark the phraseology: 'Israel,' not 'Jacob.' That is to say, he heard the terrible news in the quiet strength of the new name and power implied and guaranteed by his recent revelation from God (ver. 10). This is the only real way to meet sorrow, pain and shame—'in the strength of the Lord God.' Whatever the emergency, we may rest on the Divine assurance: 'My grace is sufficient for thee.'

How veracious is the record of Scripture! No mere human history would record the sins of notable men so fully and unflinchingly. The candour of the Bible is one of its chief claims to be Divine.

At this point we are given a full list of Jacob's children, though the names do not appear in order of birth, but according to motherhood. The children of Leah and Rachel come first, and then those of Bilhah and Zilpah. The reason for the insertion of this list here is probably because the

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long section of the 'generations of Isaac' (xxv. 19) Gen. closes with this chapter, and new sections are about xxxv. 8, to open with the generations of Esau and Jacob 16-29. (xxxvi. 1 and xxxvii. 2). The house of Isaac is therefore regarded as complete, and the subordinate position of Jacob will henceforth be changed for that of the head of the patriarchal house and line. In this connection, as we see again and again in the history, it is worth while to observe the remarkable differences between the sons of Leah and those of Rachel. They appear to be absolutely opposed in temperament and habit. Two sisters, and yet such astonishingly different children. Students of heredity will find here material worthy of their attention.

IV. *The Death of an Honoured Father* (vers. 27-29).—Jacob arrives home again at last. 'Jacob came unto Isaac his father unto Mamre . . . which is Hebron, where Abraham and Isaac sojourned.' IV. *The Death of an Honoured Father* (vers. 27-29). What memories must have been called up by that return! How he must have missed his mother as he remembered the past and all their life together there! His children, too, would be keenly interested in meeting their grandfather and the head of the family. There are few places that stir the heart more deeply than the old home of our childhood, and all the dear memories of days long gone by. Isaac, too, must have recalled the day, over thirty years before, when he spoke of himself as old and uncertain of life (xxvii. 2), and then thought of all that had happened as the result of that unhappy suggestion to Esau. But all was swallowed up in the joy of reunion, and, as we

Genesis xxv. 11—xxxvi. 3

Gen.
xxxv. 8,
16-29.

cannot doubt, in the joy of the recital of the way in which God had led both father and son all those long years of separation.

In order that the record of Isaac's life may be rounded off mention is made at this point of his death, though as a matter of fact he lived until Joseph was quite thirty years old, or thirteen years after his sale into Egypt. The statement is put in here, after the analogy of earlier accounts (xi. 32 and xxv. 8), to prepare the way for dealing solely with the record of Jacob as the head of the family. Isaac was spared for over forty years beyond the time when he expected to die (xxvii. 1, 2), and the years after Jacob's return must have been a very precious time of fellowship with God and his son as he waited the call of God. The description of his death is noteworthy: 'he gave up the ghost,' he yielded up the spirit to God Who gave it. The phrase used of Rachel (ver. 18) is worth comparing: 'as her soul was in departing.' The difference is suggestive of their different ages and the circumstances of their deaths, but the idea is essentially the same. To 'depart' or to 'give up the ghost' is not to be annihilated, but to enter upon a new state, a new life in the presence of God. The old fathers did indeed look for more than transitory promises. They had respect unto the living God, and to the city which He had prepared for them. Isaac was also 'gathered to his people,' which gives another beautiful suggestion of the life to come—that of reunion with those whom we have loved and lost awhile. And so, with the spirit at

Two Views
of Death.

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rest with God and at home with our loved ones, we learn something of what heaven is. 'With Christ' and 'with *them*,' all must and will be well. Gen. xxxv. 8, 16-29.

At the grave of their father the two brothers, Esau and Jacob, met again. With what thoughts they must have paid the last tribute of filial love and borne their father's body to its resting-place! Already reconciled (xxxiii.), this sorrow must have confirmed their friendship and made their hearts increasingly tender to each other as they recalled the past with sins and errors on both sides. Death is a wonderful healer of breaches. Happy are they who find over the grave of a loved father or mother the opportunity of reuniting severed ties. Thrice happy are they who at the graveside of a loved one have not to reunite ties, but only to deepen and confirm them in the love and grace of God. Meeting at the Graveside.

The life of Isaac, as we review it, is in striking contrast to those of his father and his sons. In their case we have lives full of incident; in his little but quietness and peace. Except for two occasions of sin (xxvi. and xxvii.), there is nothing in the record to disturb the impression that Isaac's life was of the pastoral, quiet, restful, contemplative type which based itself on the promises of God (xxvi. 24) and lived peacefully, waiting the development and progress of the Divine purpose. One word, used twice by Jacob, seems to give the clue to Isaac's character. Jacob speaks of God as 'the *Fear* of Isaac' (xxxi. 42, 53), a striking term, especially when contrasted with the customary Isaac's Life.

Genesis xxv. 11—xxxvi. 8

Gen.
xxxv. 8,
16-29.

usage, 'the God of Abraham.' Isaac's nature was contemplative, quiet, reverential, full of awe. God was his 'Fear,' not slavish dread, but filial awe. And it was this that impressed Jacob, whose nature at its root was so like that of his father. Jacob had a profound sense of reverence for God and divine things, and it is well that he had, for with him and with us all 'the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.' 'Holy and reverend is His Name.'

Suggestions
for Medita-
tion.

The cloud of sorrow hangs heavily on these verses. There are three graves and one sin recorded, and it is in connection with the sorrow caused by these events that Jacob was taught some very precious lessons. Shall we not try to learn them for ourselves?

Sorrow is
not always
sent as
Punishment.

1. *Sorrow is not always sent as punishment.*— We often bring sorrow on ourselves through our sin, but this is not always and necessarily the case. The death of Deborah came when Jacob had put himself right with God. The death of Rachel and the sin of Reuben do not appear to be traceable to any wrong-doing of Jacob. So is it to-day. Sorrow is not necessarily punishment. It may be just the opposite. It all depends on the state of our spiritual life how we understand and take sorrow. If we are right with God, we shall meet sorrow as 'Israel,' not 'Jacob,' and find in it the message God intends for us. Every affliction may be viewed in two aspects; and what from one view-point may be thought a Benoni, may from another be seen as

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a Benjamin. It all depends on our faith; and if that be real and true, then 'Faith can *sing* through days of sorrow.' We shall certainly 'faint' if we do not 'believe to see the goodness of the Lord' in the time of sorrow and pain. Gen. xxxv. 8, 16-29.

2. *Sorrow is often used for spiritual training.*— Chastening is very different from punishing, and 'it is for chastening ye endure' (Heb. xii. 7, R.V.). There is a very clear connection spiritually, as well as etymologically, between *discipleship* and *discipline*. We only become real disciples through discipline. The word rendered 'chastening' in Heb. xii. is literally 'son-making.' God makes us truly His sons by subjecting us, or allowing us to be subjected, to training and discipline; and it is for this reason that we read 'Whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth.' When Archbishop Tait, as Dean of Carlisle, lost several children in quick succession, in the short space of a few weeks, his friend Francis Close, then at Cheltenham, wrote quoting this text to the bereaved and heartbroken father, adding, 'He must love you much to chasten you so much.'

3. *Sorrow is intended to yield the peaceful fruits of righteousness.* — Who shall say how much this discipline had to do with Tait's noteworthy episcopate in London and his splendid service as Archbishop of Canterbury? Many a Christian can say with David, 'It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might *learn*' (Ps. cxix. 71). 'Before I was afflicted I went astray, but *now*——' (Ps. cxix. 67). In the description of the life of the believer in Rom. v. we must not overlook the place Sorrow should bring forth Holy Fruit.

Genesis xxv. 11—xxxvi. 8

Gen.
xxxv. 8,
16-29.

given to 'tribulation.' May it not mean that one of the ways which God takes to make our experiences real is the way of suffering? As the Son of God was made 'perfect through suffering,' so the sons of God are brought to glory in the same way. Just as the pattern of the china vase is made permanent by being put into the fire, so the impressions of God's truth and grace become part of our character by our being passed through the furnace of affliction.

'As gold must be tried in the fire,
So the heart must be tried by pain.'

And so, though our outward man perishes, our inward man is renewed day by day. Let us therefore yield ourselves to the Divine Potter, to be made into 'vessels unto honour' and conformed to His image and likeness in order to live to His glory.

XVI

'A PROFANE PERSON'

GEN. xxxvi. 1-8

1. Now these *are* the generations of Esau, who *is* Edom.

2. Esau took his wives of the daughters of Canaan; Adah the daughter of Elon the Hittite, and Aholibamah the daughter of Anah the daughter of Zibeon the Hivite;

3. And Bashemath Ishmael's daughter, sister of Nebajoth.

4. And Adah bare to Esau Eliphaz; and Bashemath bare Reuel;

5. And Aholibamah bare Jeush, and Jaalam, and Korah: these *are* the sons of Esau, which were born unto him in the land of Canaan.

6. And Esau took his wives, and his sons, and his daughters, and all the persons of his house, and his cattle, and all his beasts, and all his substance, which he had got in the land of Canaan; and went into the country from the face of his brother Jacob.

7. For their riches were more than that they might dwell together; and the land wherein they were strangers could not bear them because of their cattle.

8. Thus dwelt Esau in mount Seir: Esau *is* Edom.

TH**ERE** is perhaps no greater contrast in **Gen.** Scripture than that seen in the characters **xxxvi.** of Esau and Jacob. The one on the surface was **1-8.** interesting and attractive, the other on the surface was unattractive and often repellent, at least for a large part of his life. And yet as we include in our view of the two men the whole Bible testimony concerning them, and study with all possible care

Genesis xxv. 11—xxxvi. 8

Gen.
xxxvi.
1-8.

and completeness that which lies below the surface, we cannot help coming to the very opposite of our first conclusion. We obtain the deep impression that characters are not to be judged by superficial impressions but by a careful inquiry into the right principles of life. It will be convenient at this point to gather together the various references to Esau which we find in Genesis, and then attempt to obtain a true idea of his real character.

I. Esau's
History.

I. *Esau's History.* — The circumstances of his birth foreshadowed a remarkable history, and whenever he appears before us we cannot help being struck with the man as he reveals himself in the record.

Birthright
despised.

The first event brought before us is the sale of his birthright to Jacob (chap. xxv. 29-34). It is unnecessary in the present connection to repeat the details of the story which have already come before us, nor is it to the point to dwell upon Jacob's share in this unhappy transaction. For our present purpose it will suffice to call attention to the simple but significant comment of the writer: 'So Esau despised his birthright.' Whatever fault we may attribute to Jacob, and however great our contempt may be for his underhand dealing, we must not overlook the fact that in parting with his birthright Esau revealed his true character. He had already come to the conclusion, long before the time that Jacob made the offer, that his birthright was of no value to him. We must look beneath the surface from the very outset of the story of Esau, and when we do this we discover

'A Profane Person'

that his horizon was bounded by earth and that he had no conception whatever of the glory of the promises to Abraham and to Isaac which were associated with the birthright. **Gen. xxxvi. 1-8.**

Esau comes before us next in connection with his marriage to the two Canaanitish women (chap. xxvi. 34, 35). This deliberate association with the people of the land was another significant revelation of his true nature. Not only did he introduce into his father's family the untoward and dangerous element of polygamy, but he went his way by himself without any consultation with his parents and married into the Canaanites, and thereby led to an intermixture which it had hitherto been the special endeavour of Abraham and of Isaac to avoid. No wonder that this action of their elder son caused great grief and bitterness of spirit to Isaac and Rebekah. Once again the real man showed himself in this deliberate setting at naught of some of the most cherished principles and hopes of his people. **Unlawful Marriage.**

The next time that Esau appears before us is in connection with the blessing. Having deliberately and of set purpose bartered away his birthright, it is clear that he had subsequently come to a different mind as to its importance. Consequently, when his father wished to bestow upon him the patriarchal blessing, Esau was quite ready to enter into the plot and obtain back again by craft what he had lost by a deliberate act of his own. We do not overlook the sin of Isaac, or Rebekah, or Jacob, in calling attention to the simple fact that Esau must not be absolved from a share in this blame. We can see **Trying to gain the Blessing.**

Genesis xxv. 11—xxxvi. 8

Gen.
xxxvi.
1-8.

still further what he really was, for after he had lost the blessing, he in his rage and fury determined to kill his brother when a suitable opportunity occurred. He was a man of ungovernable impulse, without any fixed principle, never constant for long to any one thing.

Another
Marriage.

Another event further revealed Esau's true character (chap. xxviii. 8, 9) When he saw that Jacob had departed with his father's blessing to find a wife outside the land of Canaan, and from his own kith and kin, he endeavoured once again to obtain an advantage at his brother's expense by taking to himself a third wife, this time a daughter of his kinsman Ishmael. Esau seems to have been fully awake at last to the importance and value of the position of the eldest son, and he sets to work to try to retrieve his position in the eyes of his parents. Even here we cannot help noticing his practical failure, for although Ishmael was the half-brother of his father, it had been made perfectly clear that there was to be no part or lot to Ishmael in the inheritance of promise and blessing to Isaac.

On Jacob's
Return.

When Jacob returned after the years of separation in the house and country of Laban, Esau again appears as he comes with a retinue of men to meet his brother. It would seem clear that at the outset he had determined to take his revenge, but he little knew what was happening at the ford Jabbok, and how God in answer to prayer was already at work breaking down the barriers, and preparing for a full reconciliation between the brothers. Esau's hot impulses were quickly cooled at the sight of his

'A Profane Person'

brother, and the anger died down as they met and settled their differences in a loving reconciliation. Esau's warmheartedness shines out at this point and makes us all the more sorry that it played so small a part in the entire experiences of his life.

Gen. xxxvi. 1-8.

The brothers met again, and probably for the last time, at their father's death (chap. xxxv. 29), but they met only to separate permanently one from the other. The land was not large enough to maintain the households of both of them, and Esau therefore took all that he possessed and went into a land far away from his brother in the country afterwards known as Edom (chap. xxxvi. 1-8). Thenceforward the two tribes and afterwards the two races were kept apart not only geographically but in almost every other respect, and, as we know, Edom showed hostility to the people of Israel as the latter made their way from Egypt to Canaan.

The Father's Death.

II. *Esau's Character*.—The startling mystery of human nature is remarkably illustrated in the case of Esau. There was an undoubted attractiveness in his temperament and character. He was evidently of a happy and bright disposition. Nothing appeared to worry or trouble him. He took life easily and never seemed concerned with its shadows and difficulties. He was also of an affectionate disposition. His devotion to his father is evident in the narrative, and the fact of his father's devotion to him must be put to his credit. Even his impulsiveness had the elements of good and promise in it, for he was manifestly capable of generous and warmhearted dispositions. Not least

II. Esau's Character.

Genesis xxv. 11—xxxvi. 3

Gen.
xxxvi.
1-8.

of all there was a forgiving spirit in the man. Jacob had undoubtedly done him serious and irreparable wrong, and we should not have been surprised from the purely human standpoint if he had remained permanently embittered against the supplanter; but the opposite happened, and when they met after that long separation there was no trace of anger or revenge on the part of Esau, but every indication of forgiveness and personal reconciliation.

Superficial
Attractive-
ness but Real
Earthliness.

This attractiveness, however, was almost entirely on the surface, and when we look below we are bound to confess that there was much that was objectionable and even repulsive. The passionate-ness of the man is clear as we read the narrative of his attitude to Jacob. He was also in the literal meaning of the word a 'sensual' man, that is, a man whose life was lived within the region of his senses and purely physical desires and tastes. He lived for personal enjoyment at the present moment, and was evidently prepared to sacrifice everything else to gratify his own desires. Whether we think of his willingness to barter his birthright for food, or contemplate his ill-advised marriage with two Canaanitish women, we see how entirely earth-bound he was, and how fully he lived for himself alone and for his own enjoyment. But all this was only indicative of what was at the root and foundation of his life. He had no true conception of the value of things spiritual. When we are told that he 'despised his birthright' we are not to understand any mere impulse, or that he was merely victimised by a craftier nature; he had been leading up to this

'A Profane Person'

despising of the birthright by the purely secular life that he had been living. The promises of God had made no impression on him. The spiritual ideas associated with the Covenant were as nothing to him. He was in every sense earthly and earth-bound. This as we have seen is the meaning of the significant judgment in the Epistle to the Hebrews (chap. xii. 16), he was 'a profane person.' His life was purely secular, there was no sacred enclosure in it. Everything in him was of the world and the flesh, and no part of his life was devoted to God. This was at the root of his trouble. God was not in all his thoughts.

The story of Esau and the revelation of his character, as indicated by the events, carry their own personal application, but it may be worth while laying special stress upon some of the outstanding messages of this sad and disappointing life.

1. *Superficial attractiveness is not enough.*— There are many natures and temperaments which are interesting and even fascinating on the surface, full of real charm of manner and disposition, and yet all the while they hide an underlying indifference to God which easily leads to a definite hostility. The young ruler who came to our Lord had the splendid advantages of age, position, wealth, opportunity, earnestness, and even moral integrity, and yet when he was put to the test he revealed his deliberate unwillingness to surrender to Christ and to allow the Lord Jesus to be the Master of his life.

Gen.
xxxvi.
1-8.

Suggestions
for Medita-
tion.

Surface-deep
Insufficient.

Genesis xxv. 11—xxxvi. 8

Gen.
xxxvi.
1-8.

We must never be deceived by outward attractiveness in itself, though when such attractiveness springs from genuine spiritual relationship to God it is without question the most beautiful thing on the earth.

Divine Grace
Essential.

2. *Divine grace is absolutely essential.*—There are some natures which by environment, culture, and refinement seem to tend towards the ideal. They make people wonder whether after all true religion is essential to real life. Experience however goes to show in an ever-increasing way that nothing but Divine grace can guarantee a permanent character. While it is doubtless true that ‘character is three-fourths of conduct,’ it is equally true that the other fourth represents the source, spring, and guarantee of conduct itself. ‘Without Me ye can do nothing’ is a truth of absolutely universal application, and whatever education, circumstances, opportunity may do for us we can never dispense with Divine grace. Esau’s life was lived entirely on an earthly plane. The purely natural elements were supreme, and when the test came he sacrificed the spiritual opportunity that might have been his and so brought about irrevocable disaster. Grace is as much needed for character as it is for salvation, for the simple reason that character must necessarily be based upon salvation, which in turn depends upon the new nature of the divine life which is ours by faith in Christ Jesus.

Opportunity
comes to All.

3. *Opportunity comes to all.*—While it is perfectly true that God intended Jacob to inherit the spiritual blessings of the Covenant, it is equally certain that

'A Profane Person'

Esau had a sufficient opportunity of enjoying blessing at God's hands. His boyhood was spent at home under the influence of his father and mother, and it is evident from the sequel that he became aware when it was too late of the blessings that he had missed. This shows that he had been trained and taught to value those blessings, but had deliberately set them aside and despised them. No one will be able to say in the great day of account that he had no opportunity of being good. God is righteous, and will never allow any man to be at a disadvantage. Opportunity comes to all, but, alas! opportunity may easily be lost through unfaithfulness. When Esau afterward desired to inherit the blessing he was rejected, for he found no way of changing his father's mind, though he sought a blessing earnestly with tears (Heb. xii. 17). There is a solemn and loud warning in this word 'afterward,' for it tells of an awakened conscience and blighted hopes that were never realised. A man looking back upon his past life said that a great deal of his time had been spent in raising tombstones over the graves of lost opportunities. To every one of us comes the solemn word of the Master, 'How often would I . . . and ye would not.'

4. *The marvel and mercy of Divine Grace.*—While we may not and must not set aside and think lightly of life's great moral responsibilities, we are encouraged by the revelation of God in Christ to believe that Divine grace can nevertheless do much to enable us to retrieve our character. While it is true that we never can be what we otherwise might

Gen.
xxxvi.
1-8.

The Marvel
of Divine
Grace.

Genesis xxv. 11—xxxvi. 8

Gen.
xxxvi.
1-8.

have been, yet grace can do much to overrule our mistakes and even our sins. Esau always had to be content with God's second best, but even for him there was a future not unmixed with mercy and blessing. It is perfectly true that what is done cannot be undone, but it is equally true that what is done can be mended by Divine grace. Let us therefore be encouraged, in spite of our past, to put ourselves afresh into God's merciful and loving hands, feeling sure that His discipline will deal with us faithfully and lovingly, and in spite of all our sins and shortcomings bring glory to His Name out of the remnant of our life. The 'afterward' of Esau's experience (Heb. xii. 17) may be met by the 'afterward' of Divine mercy and grace (Heb. xii. 11), and our lives yet be used of God as we walk humbly and go softly, remembering the past, trusting for the present, and hoping in Him for the future.

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